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The Journal of the National Art Education Association  
September 2013 ■ Volume 66, No. 5 ■ \$9.00

IN THIS ISSUE!  
2013-2014 NAEA Resources

# STREET ART



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**BECOMES** more widespread, **MORE ACCEPTED.**

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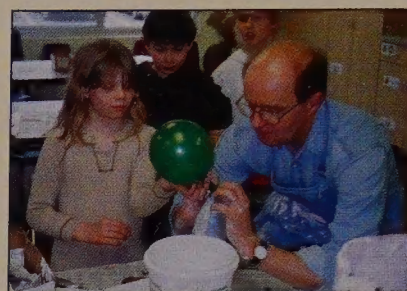
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- Cleaning Our World Through Reverse Graffiti
- Graffiti and Art Education
- An Unselfish Act: Graffiti in Art Education
- Half a Life Painting Walls
- plus visual essays by graffiti artists!



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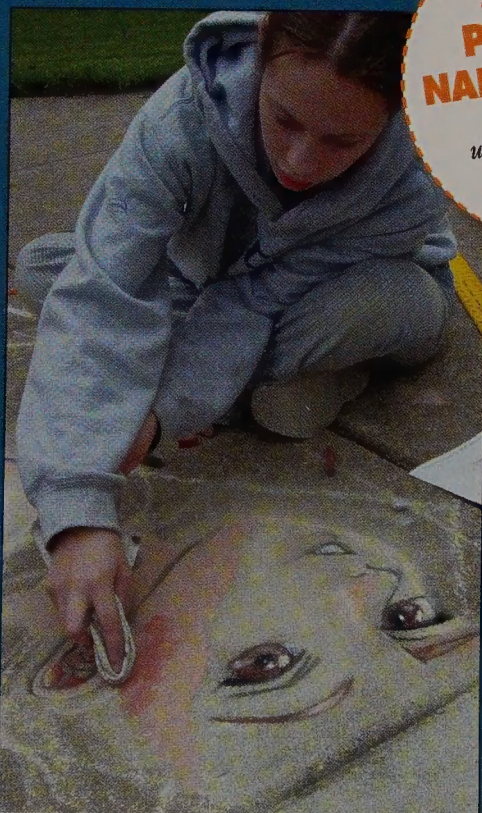
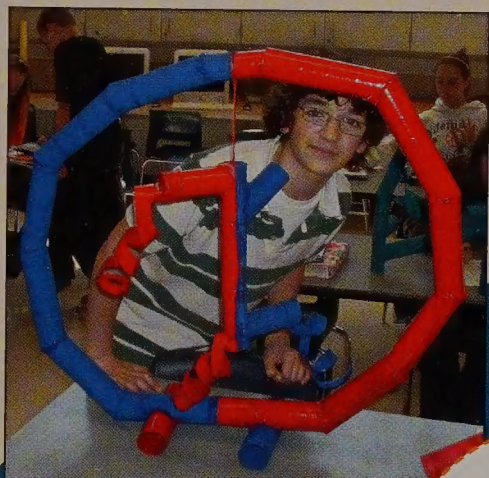
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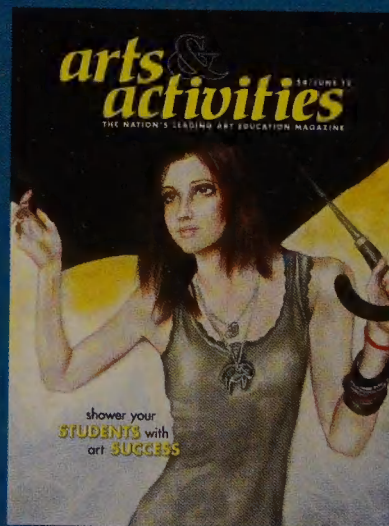


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# ART EDUCATION

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National Art Education Association

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Resources!

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Cover: A large-scale mural by the street artist Bumblebee, page 7, from "Artist-Driven Initiatives for Art Education: What We Can Learn From Street Art." Photo provided by Lord Jim.



# STREET Art

**"Well, I think for us  
it's not graffiti, and  
for many people in this local  
community, also in London  
and across the country, this  
is street art, and for us it  
raises some fundamental  
points about who is  
responsible for street art and  
who morally owns it, and the  
community owns it..."**

**—Community spokesperson  
(Luscombe, 2013, video)**

In February 2013, a 4x5-foot slab of wall was surreptitiously removed from a storefront in Haringey, London. This event would seem bizarre, save for the fact that the wall displayed a piece by UK street artist Banksy. This wall slab eventually found its way to Fine Arts Auction Miami, where it was to be sold to the highest bidder. At the last minute, the piece, titled "Slave Labour," was pulled from auction by the seller, whose identity remains unknown (Luscombe, 2013).

This is only the latest twist in the career of Banksy, one of the most famous—and infamous—contemporary street artists. His art has developed from early work that toyed with images of British power, displaying images of British police and military in a variety of compromising positions, to work that addresses social issues such as the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, and "sweatshop" labor, as seen in the image of a small child constructing the bunting used in the Queen's Diamond Jubilee (BBC, 2013).

By most metrics, street art has arrived. It is represented by a recognizable group of artists and consists of canonical works that are clearly quite valuable. The value of this type of artwork, however, may be seen as simply a passing fad. And, while there are artists willing to "cash in," there are plenty who value street art for its ephemeral, confrontational, and, in many cases, illegal qualities. Street art is contradictory: a form of artistic expression that resists institutional legitimacy while it simultaneously becomes more widespread, more accepted—an institution in its own right.

This issue of *Art Education* is dedicated to street art as it exists in its many forms, as it is viewed by art educators, curators, art historians, and artists. It does not shy away from the challenges that street art represents. In fact, it is the challenging nature of street art that makes it a relevant topic for discussion in the spaces of art education. The structure of this issue reflects the multiform nature of street art: Essays on street art are interspersed with visual essays written by contemporary street artists.



The essays contained within offer numerous perspectives on contemporary street art. In an invited essay by **G. James Daichendt**, "Artist-Driven Initiatives for Art Education: What We Can Learn From Street Art," many aspects of Los Angeles street art are discussed from an anthropological perspective. **Laurie A. Eldridge** questions the possibilities for teaching street art in the form of graffiti, based upon her teaching experience in a Phoenix middle school, in "An Unselfish Act: Graffiti in Art Education." **Gabe Randazzo** and **Lisa LaJevic** present the reader with the concept of *reverse graffiti* in "Cleaning Our World Through Reverse Graffiti." In this process, pieces are created through the removal of dust, grime, and dirt, in actions that address issues of ecology and environmentalism. **Rosalind Hampton**, with **DARE**, **HYKE**, and **JUICE**, details the illegal, and often deadly, aspects of graffiti writers based in Montreal in "Graffiti and Art Education: 'They Don't Understand How I Feel About the FUNK.'"

Visual essays by **Gabriel Lacktman**, **Bubba**, and **Morley** provide firsthand accounts of the preparation, process, and influence that go into making street art. The September Instructional Resource, written by **Miguel Aguilar**, also helps to provide a perspective on street art process and product; Aguilar discusses the relationship between graffiti and art education as a practitioner operating within both fields.

I am hopeful that this issue will raise numerous questions regarding street art. In addition, I feel that the work presented by contemporary street artists and art educators may allow for the discussion of larger issues such as community involvement in the arts, accessibility of contemporary art in schools, and subversive forms of artistic expression. I would like to thank G. James Daichendt for his guidance in contacting the artists represented in this issue, and am eager to hear what you, the reader, have to say about this topic.

Send an e-mail, write a letter, or grab some wheatpaste, a photocopy, or a can of spray paint, and...

Robert Sweeny, Editor

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Installation of hand-painted posters. © Phillip Sklavenitis 2011. See page 17.



What is street art? What can we learn from street artists? This interview-based study sets out to answer these questions and highlights the redeeming qualities of street art.

# ARTIST-DRIVEN

## Initiatives for Art Education:

# What We Can Learn From Street Art

G. JAMES DAICHENDT

**T**he economic state of California is representative of the larger financial health of the United States. The budget cuts and the faltering status of art education in public schools has contrasted much of the rhetoric and statistics for art education and employment in the visual arts. Yet contemporaneously California has also witnessed the largest production of street art in the state's history. Over 90 street art murals along with dozens of galleries, blogs, and news sites have taken the Los Angeles art scene by storm. While institutionally art education is faltering, it is thriving informally outside the professionalized field through the surprising context of street art.

Street art is a type of visual art that exists in the "streets" often illegally and incorporates aspects of graffiti mixed with traditional arts media such as sculpture, stencils, video work, and wheatpastes. While often seen as a renegade and vigilante act of artmaking, street art is surprisingly organized and has found a consistent support system in which to operate. The accessibility and crossover into pop culture through films and merchandizing has made this subculture of the art world strangely familiar to a large constituency. Especially when shopping malls and retail outlets borrow the aesthetic to make their image a bit more hip and trendy. The accessibility cannot be underestimated for encouraging deep reflection and motivation and it was this crossover that initially drew me to the world of street art.

Although graffiti is technically an illegal act, the following interview-based study contextualizes and highlights the redeeming qualities of street art. A movement that is expanding our understanding of the professional art world offers a glimpse into potential directions for art education that breaks from tradition. The characteristics highlighted in this article have aided these artists and may be modeled and facilitated in the classroom.

The data collected point toward creative dispositions practiced by this community that are helpful for facilitating positive and productive studio environments for artists inside and outside of schools. Specifically,

the roles of questioning assumptions, modeling creative behavior, and the importance of creative groups and environments are addressed. Art in many ways has become institutionalized within the school systems (from grade school to postgraduate) and looking at artistic communities that are quite different from the school setting can be helpful for recognizing what we do right as teachers and what we can do to improve the educational experiences we facilitate.

### Methodology

An adventure in the waiting, I sought to better understand the subculture of street art through the artists themselves. Using interviews to collect data, I asked about problems, successes, and processes. In what is considered a cultural interview, the behaviors, beliefs, and processes of making were important as I sought patterns for creative work (Padden & Humphries, 1988). I learned much more and found many characteristics that can be utilized in the classroom and should give us cause that the Arts are able to exist successfully outside the traditional borders of schools, galleries, and museums.

Street artists can be a tough group to infiltrate. Some seek anonymity because of the illegal nature of their work and almost all of them hide behind some type of moniker. The 40 artists I interviewed were all based in Los Angeles and included a range of creative names including: Destroy All





Figure 1. A large-scale mural by the street artist Bumblebee. Photo provided by Lord Jim.

Design, Seperthed, Earl Lee, Smear, Smog City, Buff Monster, and Blinky, among others. The personalities matched their names but it would be difficult to generalize descriptions because they range in age, background, ethnicity, and gender dramatically... although the majority of them were male and they tended to have some sort of art, design, or creative background/education.

A snowball sampling method was used to penetrate the street art social group. All the artists were based in Los Angeles, but often traveled and were known in cities outside the West Coast. I initially made contact with a well-respected street artist named Bumblebee, whose large-scale murals utilize a memorable yellow and black striped pattern (see Figure 1), and asked at the conclusion of the interview whether he would recommend

other artists I could interview. Each subsequent interview yielded a few more artists that saw the pool grow, until names began to be repeated.

Using an open-ended and general qualitative research interview process, I felt it was important to listen well and reflect upon these experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Through my analysis, I sought to describe the important themes and concepts raised by the artists in order to understand their world. The insights may not be generalizable but they expand our understanding of how creative groups work outside the walls of art schools and institutionalized educational settings. This is particularly meaningful because street artists continually create new avenues for art appreciation, professionalism, and

education—albeit quite differently from art schools and institutions.

## Defining Street Art

*Street art* is a relatively new term and the movement has gained international momentum as its main proponents have challenged the conventional paths for success in the art world. Street art has its roots in graffiti. *Grffiti* by definition is a text-based art form that involves writing one's name or the name of something important to the artist on a public surface. Commonly referred to as *tagging*, it's a symbol that someone was here (Riggle, 2010). One interviewee, ThirdOne, who writes traditional graffiti and creates street art as part of a collective called The \$tatus Faction (see Figure 2), describes graffiti writing as "selfish and self-satisfying." He



Figure 2. Traditional graffiti by the artist collective The \$tatus Faction. Photo provided by T\$F.





Figure 3. The street artist Desire Obtain Cherish illustrates a unique aspect of street art. Photo provided by the artist.

explains that the act of writing your name or more commonly your aka provides a sense of self-worth and purpose. The excitement and rush furthers this addiction, which must constantly be fed. Graffiti is also mainly limited to markers, scratching tools, and spray paint. As one moves further from the tradition of writing names and using the tools of the trade they veer toward the messy borders that separate graffiti from street art (Daichendt, 2012).

In contrast, *street art* is less concerned with letters (although they may be used) but emphasizes the visual image, contextual use of space, and uses a wider range of materials that extend beyond the spray can. The use of wheatpaste, stencils, oil/acrylic paint, and fabric are just the tip of the iceberg as street artists continually expand upon the types of materials that can be used. Street artists may also utilize the contextual aspects of the street and share some similarities to installation



Figure 4. The street artist Blinky sought to make a gallery outside.  
Photo provided by Jing Jin.





Figure 5. The political posters of Robbie Conal are often referenced by interviewees for being influential. Photo provided by Lord Jim.

art. While a large flat wall with good visibility may suit a large piece by a graffiti artist, street artists may incorporate an element of a building, alley, or crack into their design. Ironically street art borders very closely to public art and may in some cases be confused, but it's the illegal and temporal qualities that differentiate it. A set of issues that is great to debate and often lead to heated opinions.

## Context

Nationally the number of individuals identifying themselves as artists has grown from approximately 750,000 in the 1970s to over 2 million in 2008. While these are not all visual artists, these numbers clearly demonstrate the oversaturation of the art market. To put the number in perspective, the US is home to only 1 million lawyers (Gioia, 2008).

With thousands of art students graduating from colleges and universities each year, the small number of traditional opportunities that support artistic careers cannot keep up with the wave of artists entering major metropolitan areas. According to the census data, artists in the US are typically overeducated and underemployed (Gioia, 2008). Some of these artists are not satisfied with this context and have taken matters into their own hands. Thus the art by Desire Obtain Cherish (see Figure 3) reading "Who needs a gallery when I can paint here for free" rings true. Street

artists have bypassed many of the expected paths that artists feel they must traverse in order to make a living. In a similar fashion, the street artist Blinky became tired of waiting for gallery directors to include him in their shows so he created his own gallery in the street (see Figure 4). Instead of awaiting a break from a gallery, museum, or patron, these artists use the city as their canvas and have developed large followings that provoked many galleries, writers, curators, and collectors to take notice instead of the other way around. By focusing on abandoned buildings, electrical boxes, and overlooked sections of the city, a visual dialogue has begun that is hard to ignore.

## What We Can Learn From Street Artists

There are questionable ethics involved in the art form but from these interviews I found several characteristics to be consistent, including the necessity of questioning assumptions, modeling creative behavior, and the importance of creative groups and environments. These creative attributes are part of the communicability of the art and the centrality of the art object in a contemporary landscape that increasingly values the concept. The emerging discipline of street art can be a model for the creative growth of artists. Through this study I learned that these characteristics are necessary for facilitating this environment and are important for its continued success.



An unusual use of media may be just the type of breakthrough that allows students to push their thinking forward. In more than one case, a younger street artist has acquired skills at a much more rapid pace because of modeling. In addition, sharing the skills or talents with peers makes this new knowledge accessible.

### Questioning Assumptions

Questioning the status quo in the Arts is a positive characteristic because there is not one set of rules for making art; the street artists interviewed consistently demonstrated this to me. The paradigm for success in the art world includes receiving a BFA, MFA, and then—if you're lucky—getting a gallery to pay attention to you by arranging a show of your work once every 2 years. The street art movement has challenged many of these assumptions regarding the “right” or “proper” method for becoming an artist. This applies to education, networks, and the status of high and low art, notions of success, and the role of imagery in society. Traditional art world assumptions for making it in the art world (or just making art) can still be utilized, but street artists are not dependent on them. Their work is shown regularly, imagery is repeated, and they market themselves without depending on the gallery system. These artists have created opportunities where there were none, and that type of ingenuity should be applauded. The artist Sabo captures this sentiment when he described the small amount of materials he needs to make art in contrast to the large impact it can potentially have on an audience.

### Modeling Creative Behavior

Initially I was under the romantic impression that street art was largely conducted by individuals who, under the cover of darkness, posted their art in secrecy. Alone, hooded, and ducking in between alleys, these masters of the night were vigilantes that must get their work up in the public square. This is partially true because street artists sometimes do work at night and sometimes alone. However, on more than one occasion, artists such as Thank You X prefer to work when the streets are empty, but this does not mean they work in isolation.

I underestimated the importance that role models have within this community. The artist Blinky emphasized that certain artists provided examples of how to take work to the next level. Sometimes that means going bigger, getting it higher, or creating more complex designs. While the artists didn't necessarily interact with one another, they clearly were very knowledgeable about the work of others they admired. Artists including Shepard Fairey, Buff Monster, Robbie Conal (see Figure 5), and Seizer were constantly cited as inspirations for pushing work further.

Role models break barriers and extend the spectrum of possibilities. While all artists may not meet in person, exposure to their work in the streets inspires more work and there is no shortage of strong work to inspire. Seeing other's accomplishments or how they have tackled large projects or unusual contexts for making street art is inspirational. These acts push the field of street art forward. Sometimes it may be a simple technique and in other cases a strong conceptual statement.

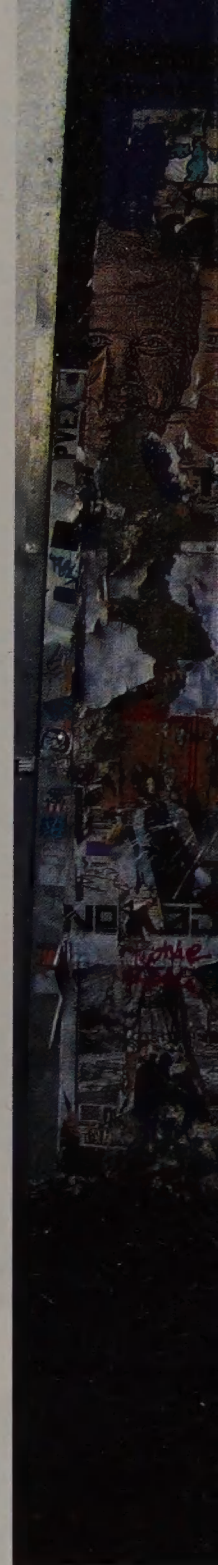






Figure 6. The Bulletin Board in downtown Los Angeles is an area where street art is encouraged. Photo provided by T5F.

The characteristics displayed by a role model may break barriers of what is possible or what is known. When students display such behavior, instructors can acknowledge such thinking or actions. And once recognized, it can then be replicated or adapted. An unusual use of media may be just the type of breakthrough that allows students to push their thinking forward. In more than one case, a younger street artist has acquired skills at a much more rapid pace because of modeling. In addition, sharing the skills or talents with peers makes this new knowledge accessible. It should not be a surprise that shortly after the acclaimed documentary movie *Exit Through the Gift Shop* premiered—which starred L.A. street artist Mr. Brainwash's rise to fame—there was a huge upswing in street art activity. The movie ironically featured a formula for success that many have utilized quite well that includes self-promotion

through street art/advertising and dovetails into a self-created exhibition. The end result is sales of prints and paintings packaged as street art.

### Creative Groups and Environments

Idea generation happens in creative groups. In Los Angeles there are particular spots where artists are invited and where their work is facilitated on a consistent basis. The most notable include the De La Barracuda Wall on Melrose Avenue, the Bates Motel on Sunset, the Echo Park wall, and the Bulletin Board in the Arts District. All are excellent examples of ongoing conversations where imagery is layered upon each other or where multiple artworks are placed in close proximity (see Figure 6).



A location and scene can foster creativity and these stimulating environments are a big part of the excitement for street art in L.A. The history of all the locations shared is heightened by the continued activity and based upon the number of impressive works that have been installed over the years. The additional electrical boxes, adjacent walls, and signage allow for more dialogue between the artworks and are an evolving installation on the street. This is why building owners, local schools, and even the downtown L.A. library have commissioned or facilitated street art murals on the sides of their buildings. An exciting characteristic to emulate, supportive environments like these improve all aspects of our creative life and work.

This is why I believe city centers are hubs for street art. The community is important for creation and appreciation. The environment facilitates such growth. Students often seek such community when they enter art school. Critique groups and mentor-mentee relationships are formed, which allow advanced dialogue and learning. Communities within cities such as Los Angeles have facilitated something similar through the Web. Virtual communities through Flickr, Facebook, and blogs allow conversations and support from fans, collectors, and other artists to happen without the institutional guidelines. This is an exciting development for artistic growth outside the mainstream education and gallery-circles.

Support groups are an essential element of creative practice. From group critique to community building, they are important aspects of sustaining creative dialogue and production. Several street art names that I initially thought were individuals turned out to be artist collectives. Groups including The \$tatus Faction, Herkut, and Cyrle are composed of multiple individuals that bring their skill sets to the larger group for support and consistency.

## Conclusion

The field of art education should be attentive to the recent successes of street artists. The institutionalized educational systems currently in place can be quite constrictive and to expand our vision, untraditional methods should be considered. Street artists have completely re-imagined what a career in the Arts looks like. Unusual materials including spray paint, collaborating with fellow students, less focus on the idea of individual genius, more emphasis on group work, and alternative methods for exhibiting work can all be explored in the classroom in ways that break traditional modes of education.

The large numbers of street artists that are getting their messages out, achieving success, or even just surviving are modeling creative traits for others, which may be picked up and used for individual projects. Thus the community aspects of street art can be like the classroom. Instead of photographers, blogs, and websites, each member of the classroom can play a part in an encouraging environment where there is support for thinking differently with materials, authorship, and community.

If we are left with anything because of street art, it's the refocus on characteristics that we take for granted in art education. The incredible support for these artists is truly groundbreaking and something art educators need to address. The alternative education and process of becoming a street artist flies in the face of everything we know about becoming a successful artist. And thank goodness, because this is the type of directional change we expect from creative thinkers.

---

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Caught in the moment: painting "Holy Rollers" in Atlanta, Georgia. © Warren Upson 2009.

# GROWING UP WITH GRAFFITI:

Reflections on Transitioning From a Part-Time Felon  
to a Full-Time Artist, and Then Back Again

GABRIEL LACKTMAN

## The Playing Field

**Can art be a sport?** Your average artist seeks refuge in the blanket of self-expression, and successfully avoiding all disconcerting competition. However, in the 1990s when my interest in graffiti became a lifestyle, the theme was all about "the art of getting over" or "the art of getting up." Art was a game and it was called graffiti.

Graffiti is an anomaly in the art world because only a percentage is the aesthetic quality, while the rest relies on the sport of how and where it's done. Public placement and lack of permission are the fundamentals. "Getting away with it" might really be the art of graffiti. One could choose to judge graffiti on its scale. The bigger is simply better. Is it 10 feet? Is it 80 feet? Did you paint over an entire train car? Others will judge it on geographic location; the more daring or imposing the place, the more valuable it is to graffiti. Was it done defying death on a bridge overpass? Where you running across the freeways? Did

you put your moniker right on the local police station? While the initiation of a point system will always be absurd, if there was honor among thieves, we would be keeping score. Graffiti by nature is self-indulgent and narcissistic; the root is putting your name in the face of others, by any means necessary. You must be relevant and there is an overwhelming competition to get noticed in a city that is busy and preoccupied. Graffiti might be 50% art and 50% sport; most get into it to play the game, and a few stay around long enough to create something with more meaning.



## Graffiti as a Lifestyle

Many vegans will exclaim, "it's not just a diet, it's a lifestyle"; this rings true for graffiti artists, too. What once began as fun and juvenile, perhaps even fleeting or innocent, can transform into an addiction. Those who never recover will admit it's always on their mind. Graffiti consumes the way you look at our urban topography and how you view an advertisement's typography. It entails always checking in on the competition—my eyes are glued to the walls when I'm driving my daily commute. I'm either thinking "what a good spot that guy got" or "why didn't I think of that?" or "oh, that's the perfect place for me to hit." It's been almost 2 decades and I'm afraid I'll never be healthy.

In my early teens, I gained my entrance to graffiti by the typical rebellious subcultures of skateboarding and hip-hop music. It passed the time through high school and helped me create an identity among friends. I dubbed my alias "ThirdOne" or "3rdOne"; it never held a significant meaning behind it—I just liked the letter combinations. I thrived for the attention any teenager wanted; I just happened to choose an unconventional means. I was drawn to the thrill and the freedom. The risk always reaped the rewards for me. Some people believe getting caught is a trophy or a badge of honor. While getting a purple heart for



In high school I proudly posed next to my masterpiece in Gainesville, Florida. © Gabriel Lacktman 1998.

being wounded in battle is a prestigious merit, for me it was the opposite: Never getting arrested was my greatest accomplishment. Doing whatever I wanted, wherever I wanted, was enough motive for me to continue.

The '90s was an era of "spray can art" or "aerosol art." The term "street art" had not developed. Even the availability of designer-brand spray paint was not invented yet. It's important to note that at this time in history, the use of stencils was considered "cheating" and stickers were a cheap shot at gaining attention. While graffiti artists used stickers, the most common form was to steal blank labels from the post office and decorate them with alcohol-based markers, such as

Prismacolors. We could spend a good 10-30 minutes creating a small piece of graffiti, just to make one sticker. Unlike today, I was unaware of anyone using companies to commercially screen print thousands of stickers at a time. If it wasn't made by hand, again, you were made to feel like a phony—same thing with using a brush on a wall. Wheatpasting and posters might have been on the horizon in New York, but by no means would a self-respecting traditional graffiti artist use these defiant tactics. It was strictly cans of spray paint, found exclusively at local hardware stores. It was about your letterforms, your control of the paint, the colors you used, and the optional rendering of cartoonish characters.

With a ripe addiction, coupled with a mature tolerance,  
how do I continue to feed my disease?





## Boston and Art School

Art was all I knew, and in 1999 I moved to Boston, a much larger city than where I grew up. I was concentrating on graphic design and studying to get my BFA at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design. The transition from getting reprimanded for drawing in high school classrooms to being required to draw in college classrooms was unequalled.

Boston was a mecca of talented graffiti artists. I gained a mentor and a circle of friends who all pursued graffiti together. It was a pivotal moment, because now I began to understand the true fundamentals of art and design. Through typical curriculum including color theory, advanced typography, and art history, I was able to apply traditional principles of art to my graffiti. I was beginning to recognize the spectrum of underlying tools that develop successful visual communication.

In some aspects I consider college a plateau of my graffiti career. I did most of my best spray can art in those 4 years. I achieved the placements, the sizes, and the attention that made me content at that time. I learned new techniques and successfully evaded law enforcement for another 4 years, regardless of some very unsettling close encounters.

The egos and pride of a graffiti artist are insurmountable. To this day, controversy over college-educated graffiti writers exists. It's always been odd to me, but some remain stringent that "art school is cheating." Perhaps it stems from only jealousy or insecurity but

I can recall many casual conversations with other graffiti writers that "so and so goes to art school," with a tone that suggests it's an unfair advantage to the competition. Is the formal education of art a steroid to one's graffiti? I think it probably is, but my opinion is that anyone and everyone can and should attain some form of higher education. If the knowledge is available, why should you deny yourself of it? Even considering how ethically bankrupt vandalism is, the strict ethics of its participants are unusually ironic. Perhaps this is just a moment of when "keeping it real" goes wrong.

## Los Angeles and The \$tatus Faction

Paralleling the abnormality of an alcoholic's behavior, graffiti is cunning, baffling, and powerful. With a ripe addiction, coupled with a mature tolerance, how do I continue to feed my disease? In 2003, I moved across the country to Los Angeles, the second-most populated city in the US. Lacking snowfall and rain, the season for graffiti is year-round. With great independence came great responsibility and I invested my energy and time in becoming a professional and commercial graphic designer. Graffiti was lost in my priorities, but addictive behavior remains dormant only while you suppress it; you're never really "cured."

After I settled into a routine and commendable design career, street art exploded. My close friends in L.A. were raised in the same demands of traditional graffiti, but everything



Risking safety always comes with the territory. In 2002, I climbed four stories of scaffolding to paint graffiti on this Mass Ave. rooftop in Boston. © Gabriel Lacktman.



### far left

Random sketches from my notebooks. © Gabriel Lacktman 1999-2003.

### center

In 2002, during my junior year of college, I painted this piece in Sarasota, Florida. It's often haunted me as a symbol of my plateau with spray paint. © Gabriel Lacktman.

### left

This patriotic theme was painted in Boston September 12, 2001: one night after planes left from Boston's Logan Airport and crashed into the New York World Trade Center. © Gabriel Lacktman.





started to evolve. For continued decades many individual graffiti artists represent an organization or crew, usually under a three-letter acronym; there are infinite ones that exist. You would tag your name and then write the three letters of your crew (usually much smaller) next to your tag. You were the meat and the crew was the potatoes.

In 2007, we formed a new artist collective and called ourselves The \$tatus Faction (T\$F). We stood apart from the tradition, because we agreed to abandon the majority of our personal identity as individual graffiti writers and foster only one name, functioning as a team. There would be only a big artery-clogging steak to eat—no side dishes. We recognized our individual limitations of spray paint and opted to use any tools necessary to make our mark. Typical to growing up, certain stigmas of fitting in became of less concern.

This meant new rules and new tools: stickers, tons and tons of stickers in any format, stencils of all sizes, bucket paint with brushes, posters, found objects, and of course spray paint—but nothing was off limits. Everything once forbidden became grounds for a renewed interest and revolution. Thus entering my personal divide from graffiti writer to street artist.

Now that focusing on our compartmentalized self-promotion was absent, we had the gift to create a message, provoke a thought, and utilize alternative mediums. Our love became not about seeing our name in public, but reaching a greater audience. Los Angeles was falling in love with street art and many people rejoiced in being able to understand it

## We had the gift to create a message, provoke a thought

**top**  
Standing tall along Sunset Blvd., "Get Over Yourself" was a humorous and vitriolic message to the people of Los Angeles. © Gabriel Lacktman, 2010.

**above**  
This "xerox machine monster" was our metaphor to street artists who often overuse photocopying as their means to produce posters. © Gabriel Lacktman, 2012.

**right**  
This work is aptly titled "Off the Beaten Path," because police brutality has long remained a hot topic in Los Angeles. This partially torched wall created a perfect backdrop for the addition of life-sized stencils. © Gabriel Lacktman, 2011.





beyond typical vandalism. We continued to relish in the freedom to express whatever we wanted with or without consent, and it snowballed from there. We would organize art shows, paint live inside nightclubs and bars, host music events, and create legal (even commissioned) murals. Essentially everything that was frowned upon in our graffiti upbringing became our liberty under the guise of The \$tatus Faction, an aptly coined name stemming from our initial goal of “satisfaction.”

Five years later, The \$tatus Faction feels natural to me. We focus on accomplishing goals that would be impossible for one man to pull off alone. We’ve travelled together and spread out over multiple cities; we’ve done what seemed impossible when I was 16. We’ve illegally painted walls that are well over 20 feet tall, and I’ve been able to apply my talent as a graphic designer to create posters that don’t need to sell a product. We infuse a great sense of humor and satire in our work. We love to say what people are afraid to. We often point out some of the injustices in society because we can, and we do it sarcastically. Those ambitions were never accomplished by just illuminating the autograph of my alias as a tagger. The thrill is still there, the risk is still rewarding, but we get the appreciation from outsiders. It’s no longer about graffiti artists communicating

only to other graffiti artists—we can reach *anyone*.

We tackle community issues we find relevant. It’s not always the most important or obvious political agendas, but it’s our ingenuity that separates us. It’s not even our technical ability or skills as artists. A large percent of the time we don’t even care how it looks. It’s about the act itself. It’s freeing to release the fears of being judged. We don’t care what people think; it’s still a mainly self-indulgent activity. We’re aware that we may not be the best at any one part of the process in particular, but that carefree attitude is what inspires us to never stop.

Examples of our mentality are frequently drawn from life in Los Angeles. The issues of celebrity fetish, police brutality, and self-obsession run rampant around here. We’ll even focus on self-deprecating humor and poke fun at our own culture of street art. It’s counterproductive to take yourself too seriously, and the pressure from the past to do graffiti the “right” or “wrong” way has turned us into uncensored visual comedians. We can’t do anything wrong anymore, in part because we feel there is nothing left to prove. So many subcultures require you to “pay your dues” before you are even given the recognition of existence. The \$tatus Faction kept the receipt of that payment.



and utilize alternative mediums.



**top**  
Along the famed L.A. Sunset Strip, this enormous sticker reminds the city about its dark love affair with money and cocaine. © Gabriel Lacktman, 2010.

**above**  
Hundreds of stickers give the appearance of wallpaper on this dumpster. © Gabriel Lacktman, 2010.

**left**  
Los Angeles proves to be mixing up its priorities. This installation of hand-painted posters juxtaposes the social issues of our overwhelming homeless population and L.A.’s notorious paparazzi. © Phillip Sklavenitis 2011.





During any local election the city becomes riddled with political advertising. The \$tatus Faction stenciled timely posters satirizing—yet simultaneously contributing to—said visual pollution. © Birdman 2013.

## Issues in Street Art Today

Does street art lose its luster after it becomes mainstream? Some think graffiti jumped the shark after the Museum of Contemporary Art had its largest grossing exhibit, titled “Art in the Streets.” It’s hard to make sense of it all when the reason I became interested in these things in the first place is because they were DIFFERENT and rebellious. On the other hand it’s been a lifelong battle trying to explain to people why graffiti is great and has redeeming quality. Perhaps we should celebrate this acceptance into modern society.

Graffiti is funny because when you’re young, you’re really not good at it, but when you get good at it, you’re usually old enough to know better. I’m in my 30s now and it’s been an arduous journey for the members of The \$tatus Faction. I have a family to provide for and a serious career. I can’t frequently stay up

to the wee hours of the night risking my legal freedom to paint a wall. It’s complicated for some of us, and we’re not ready, or accepting, to let go. It’s at this junction that I define the triumph of a street artist. Only with time can I measure success. There is a never-ending flow of seasonal participants, and what is a fad to some might truly be a lifestyle to others. I acknowledge I am not the best of the best, but it never stops me. I am successful because I keep playing the game. I congratulate anyone who has committed artistic acts of vandalism for over 10 years. I don’t know if I will actually get “better” at graffiti or if my skills will improve, but I don’t care anymore. It’s a competition of endurance now. The mission is to keep it interesting. I’ve dissolved the divide between fine artist, street artist, graffiti artist, and graphic artist. I’ve renewed my enthusiasm with an evolution. I consider myself an artist, just plain and simple.

If graffiti was a sport, it might be reckoned to golf. The challenge is never over. Some games are great and others are just off. You practice and practice and have memorized the muscle movement, but interferences cannot be predicted. You could be young and athletic but lose to a senior citizen. You could be a seasoned golfer and lose to a new player. You might be the greatest, but how long will it last? Are you only as good as your last game? Or are you as good as your BEST game? It doesn’t matter because you love the sport of it, frustration and all. No matter how many years you play the street art game, you’ll never perfect it. ■



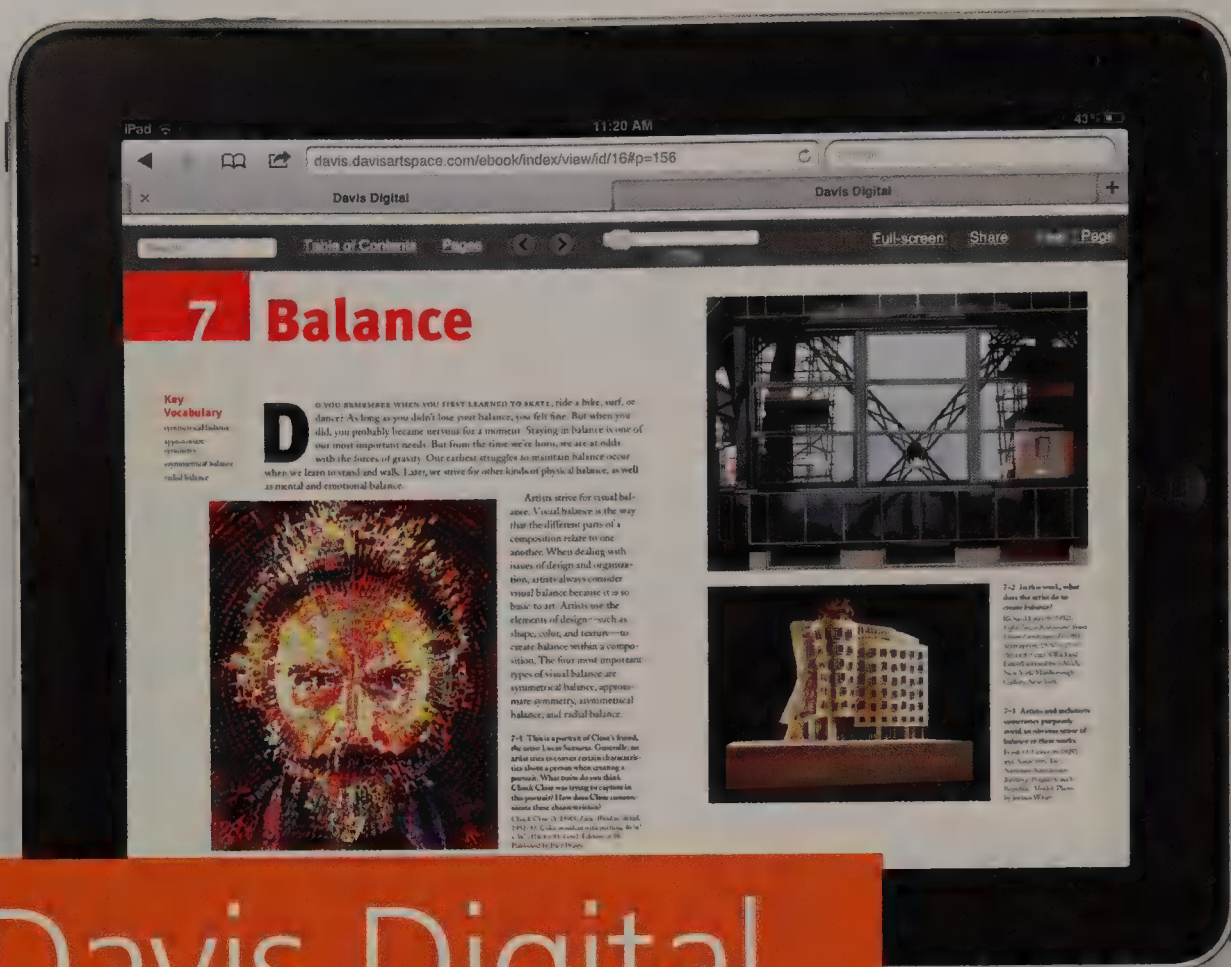


**top**  
Since gas prices started to skyrocket, commuting by bicycle has become more popular than ever. With the increase in cycling came the increase in theft. These hand screen-printed wheatpastes poke fun at your average wanted poster. © Gabriel Lacktman, 2011.

**right**  
It took four daring individuals and two haunting nights to execute this massive graffiti along Atlanta's busy freeway. © Gabriel Lacktman, 2009.

Graphic designer and graffiti artist Gabriel Lacktman, aka "ThirdOne," has created graffiti in Florida, Boston, and L.A. He holds a BFA from the Massachusetts College of Art and Design and belongs to The \$tatus Faction, a diverse group of street artists in L.A. E-mail: [thirdone@earthlink.net](mailto:thirdone@earthlink.net)





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Graffiti artist Sentrock sees his graffiti as a selfless act, a way of giving back to the community—when done legally—and inspires a group of middle school students.

## An Unselfish Act:

# Graffiti in Art Education

LAURIE A. ELDRIDGE

**“When you do graffiti, the art form of it, it is a very unselfish act.”**

—Sentrock

**T**he 7th- and 8th-grade students were assembled in a rough circle. In the center of the circle a young man was breakdancing to the steady beat of the “soul clap”<sup>1</sup> the students were creating. The students were amazed and delighted that a graffiti artist and b-boy<sup>2</sup> was at their school and was going to teach them about the art form of graffiti.

### Context of the Study

This is a case study of an artist and educator, Sentrock, who teaches about graffiti art in public schools. He is unique in that he delineates between graffiti art and vandalism, and teaches about this delineation. Graffiti as a form of vandalism is a common sight in the neighborhoods surrounding the school where I teach, and some had occurred on school property. I teach visual art at a low-income, predominantly Hispanic school near Phoenix, Arizona.

A few of my students thought “tagging” was cool and perhaps a defiant way of getting back at the school. Tagging is a form of graffiti where a graffiti writer marks a word or symbol to indicate his or her passage through various locales in the community (Bowen, 1999). For some students who desire to engage in activities unacceptable to adults, public illegal graffiti is enormously attractive (Kan, 2001). The school administration viewed tagging as a symptom of disenfranchisement and dissatisfaction with an administrator, teacher, or other authority figure at school; and lack of tagging as an expression of support for community values and the positive influence of school in students’ lives. I saw an opportunity to make connections to students’ lived experiences and visual culture through graffiti art.

I adhered to Kan’s (2001) tips for art teachers who wish to incorporate graffiti into their curricula: (1) **Age appropriateness**—I focused the graffiti unit on 7th and 8th graders, who I concluded had done the majority of the tagging in our school community; (2) **Approval of all authorities**—I discussed the proposed unit with the principal prior to implementation of the unit, and she discussed it with her supervisor, as well; (3) **Consider the community and its interests**—The city in which the school is located has an anti-graffiti unit in its police force, and the students were living in a situation where graffiti was commonplace, sometimes gang-related; and (4) **Involve a decent graffiti writer**—The graffiti artist Sentrock who was the visiting artist is well-known in the Phoenix area art scene.

This opportunity for students to learn from Sentrock was in part due to an administrator who was willing to look at what was important in students’ lives.

Whether instigated by ideological bias or from fear of reprisal, censorship through exclusion [from the curriculum] clearly has consequences for the kinds of education students receive, the kinds of skills and outlooks they come to possess, and ultimately, the types of lives they go on to live. (Darts, 2008, p. 113)



Some administrators and art educators would see the exclusion of graffiti art from the curriculum as a deterrent to vandalism. They would possibly see teaching about graffiti art as the education of vandals. I was fortunate that the administrator I worked with saw an opportunity for educating students about the difference between vandalism and graffiti art so that they would stop vandalizing the school property and their neighborhood, risking getting arrested, and instead turn their interest in graffiti in a positive direction.

Sentrock graciously agreed to give his time to teach about graffiti art to the 7th- and 8th-grade students. He also agreed to become a research participant in a case study that focused on what and how he taught about graffiti art, and the motivation behind his teaching and artwork. Research questions of the study included: What should be taught about graffiti art in schools? Why should it be taught? What inspires Sentrock to create graffiti art and teach about it to students?

This study is significant because graffiti artists have rarely been heard by researchers, by the art community, in art education, or in wider society (Bowen, 1999). Also, graffiti is part of the visual culture of many students. Learning the difference between graffiti as an art form and graffiti as vandalism is important for these students. This difference needs to be explored to allow students to make connections between their art worlds and the art worlds of school. Learning about the teaching techniques and motivations of a graffiti artist can be important in learning how to build a bridge between the visual culture of preteens/teens and school.

## Framing the Study

Visual culture education has become a predominant concept in the field of art education. Increasingly, this theory is making its way into art classrooms when art educators attempt to combine theory and practice. Working through this process can be challenging, messy, change-producing, thoughtful, and will at times miss the mark only to be tried again. In this article I will examine the teaching methods of a graffiti artist/educator within the paradigm of visual culture education.

The once-clear distinction between high and low art<sup>3</sup> no longer holds; everyday life

has become visual culture (Duncum, 2001). Traditionally schools have taught about fine arts and crafts. Students have been expected to master the elements and principles of design and composition, skills such as perspective drawing, structures of formal analysis, and technical skills of ceramics or painting (Hicks, 2004). Visual culture is broad enough to include traditional fine arts and crafts, popular culture, and the energy of ordinary life (Carter, 2008; Efland, 2004). In visual culture education, art teachers acknowledge students' everyday experiences as valuable and use students' own cultural experiences as guideposts for deciding what is educationally important, while at the same time becoming learners (Duncum, 2002; Efland, 2004; Tavin, 2003). Art teachers often ignore or refuse to acknowledge the pedagogical importance of popular culture, thus devaluing students' knowledge and overshadowing their own lived experiences (Tavin, 2005).

There is room for what Hicks (2004) calls the "finite games" of teaching perspective drawing, color theory, and traditions and history of fine art—but these should not be the end goals of art education. Art education should not simply be educating students about the formal and technical qualities of artifacts and their production (Freedman, 2000). The evolving social worlds of visual imagery as they constitute attitudes, beliefs, and values are what art educators also need to focus on (Carter, 2008; Duncum, 2001; Hicks, 2004). In the current drive to re-conceptualize art education as visual culture education, art educators need to be concerned with more than just the creation of visual images. They need to be concerned with the whole context of images, their production, and the lived experience of those who view and interpret them (Duncum, 2004). Visual cultural education examines the icons, meanings, and forms present through our cultural spaces and social experiences and should involve a willingness to consider cultural forms that have value and meaning for students (Duncum, 1987; Hicks, 2004).

## Background

Grffiti is an ancient form of human communication and can be found in ruins dated to early civilizations (Christen, 2003). In the United States, graffiti gained widespread attention after its proliferation in urban neighborhoods during the 1960s and 1970s (Christen, 2003). Tagging began in New York City in the early 1970s when Vic, a mail courier who rode local buses and subways to deliver his packages, allegedly set a goal for himself to visit every subway and bus, writing his name and courier identification number (156) on each one. Then a young Greek American delivery messenger began writing "Taki 183" all over New York City, popularizing the idea so much that others began to follow his lead (Chang, 2005; Higgins, 2009). Later, taggers figured that they could mark their territory and leave a mark on the wider city by writing their names on subway cars in train yards. Also, they could tag more subway cars in train yards without *bombing* (getting caught) (Higgins, 2009).

Grffiti writing eventually became bigger and more stylized, developing from tags to *pieces*, short for masterpieces. Piecing

What should  
be taught  
about graffiti  
art in schools?  
Why should  
it be taught?  
What inspires  
Sentrock to  
create graffiti  
art and teach  
about it to  
students?



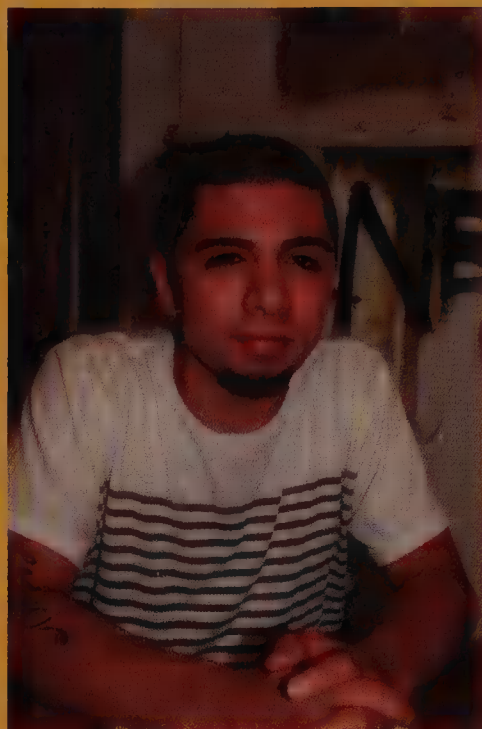
demands decorative expression, artistic skill, and understanding of aerosol paint control (Alonso, 1998).

During the 1980s graffiti was being sold in galleries as fine art; the work by artists such as Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat were sought after by some collectors (Bowen, 1999; Chang, 2005; Kan, 2001). The 1980s also saw the emergence of *wildstyle*, an angular and sometimes hard to read, intertwined and decorative lettering that sometimes mixes icons and images from popular culture (Bowen, 1999; Kan, 2001).

The act of spray painting on public spaces has been considered vandalism and is linked in other literature as a sociological phenomenon connected to the usually low socioeconomic status of participants and their need to establish their place in society; this view changed when critiqued by art historians, art critics, and art educators (Bowen, 1999). Although gangs have produced a portion of urban graffiti, graffiti is more closely linked to hip-hop, a mixture of cultural practices that arose from the neighborhoods of New York and other U.S. cities during the mid-1970s (Christen, 2003).

Hip-hop culture is a diaspora that spans ethnic, linguistic, and geographical boundaries. Hip-hop often gives voice to otherwise voiceless members of global marginalities. Hip-hop culture influences styles of behavior and dress from sagging pants to oversized T-shirts. Hip-hop style is important for the recording industry and also the clothing, fashion, accessories, and beauty industries (Motley & Henderson, 2008).

The four main elements of hip-hop culture are graffiti, breakdancing, DJing, and MCing. Originally the master of ceremonies (MC) introduced the disc jockey (DJ) and the music. To generate excitement, the MC would greet the audience and encourage verbal exchanges, and over time the practice developed into rapping (Motley & Henderson, 2008). DJs who provided music for house and block parties began to experiment with manipulating records back and forth to create scratching sounds and to mix segments of “breaks” from existing records into dance music. Breakdancers would perform acrobatic moves drawn African and Brazilian dance traditions. Graffiti was developed in the same neighborhoods and some of the DJs, MCs, rappers, and breakdancers were or had been graffiti writers (Christen, 2003).



Sentrock, 2011. Photo by the author.



*Eye Always Knew You Were Beautiful*. 2011 by Sentrock. Photo by the author, with permission from the artist.

## Introducing Sentrock

Sentrock's unique motivation and his teaching technique are worthy of a more in-depth study that describes the concepts that surround his teaching. From this description other art educators may obtain deeper understanding of teaching about graffiti art in hope of making connections between students' everyday visual culture of the street, which is important to them, and school.

Sentrock is a 24-year-old Hispanic artist/educator who works in the media of spray paint and acrylics on canvas and in public areas where he has gained permission to paint.<sup>4</sup> His work focuses mainly on lettering styles and unique characters and is not overtly political or social in content. He teaches at after-school programs and visiting artist residencies in the greater Phoenix area. I was involved in participant observation with Sentrock over a period of 2 months. I observed as he gave a 30-minute introductory presentation to 7th and 8th graders in my art classes on the definition of graffiti art, how graffiti art is different from vandalism, the history of graffiti art, and an overview of his artwork. Sentrock taught the basics of graffiti writing to seven classes that lasted an hour each. I also interviewed Sentrock in his studio, where he felt comfortable and which provided additional material data in the form of his canvases and prints. The interview, which was semistructured and conversational and guided by interview questions, was tape-recorded and later transcribed.

In addition to field notes written during my participant observation and the transcribed interview, I examined our e-mails, his artwork, and the material artifact of a video recorded by Sentrock about an after-school project in which he was involved, titled *The Rise*.<sup>5</sup> Sentrock's artwork consists of stylized characters painted in a flat style with phrases or words often written around them. His large public murals are often of his name in *wildstyle*. I familiarized myself with the data, then coded the data manually and allowed themes to emerge using the



He [Sentrock] believes... that teaching graffiti art to students is one way to disrupt a system that all too often teaches mindless obedience and conventionality.



*Bird City*. 2011 by Sentrock. Photo by the author, with permission of the artist.

constant comparative method. The constant comparative method of data analysis is inductive. First the researcher gathers key points of the data through coding, and then she sorts the codes into concepts and categories that are then used to develop final insights. To increase the trustworthiness of the study, I used member checks, sharing my emergent findings with Sentrock. I triangulated the data from several sources, and asked two colleagues to read and comment on the research.<sup>6</sup>

Sentrock is adamant in his delineation between graffiti and graffiti art. He states that graffiti itself is illegal, and graffiti art is different because it is done legally and focuses on the artistic form of the work. "Graffiti [both the legal and illegal forms] is a very raw and organic form of expression that came from kids just wanting to express themselves."<sup>7</sup> Sentrock was one of those youngsters, who used graffiti as a form of self-expression. He was in 1st grade when he and other students worked with muralist Martin Moreno to develop a mural for their school, which was when he learned that art was important to him. He had some art classes in 7th grade and in high school but learned the basics of graffiti writing from a friend's older brother. Mostly, though, Sentrock was self-taught; "As a kid me and my friend learned from his older brother, and we saw some other people who did it [graffiti]; we learned from each other but we also had to dig deep within ourselves to discover our art form, perfecting our craft." During his high school years Sentrock turned from graffiti to creating graffiti art on canvases. Later he took a drawing class at a community college in part to improve his graffiti art skills.

## Contributing to the Community/Selflessness

One overarching idea emerged from the data: that Sentrock sees his graffiti art and teaching about graffiti art as a means for giving back to the community. All other subsequent themes informed this major theme in the research. Hearing Sentrock speak about his community and his *crew* (other graffiti artists who work together to produce pieces) gives a different slant to the usual idea of what graffiti concerns. Instead of the rush of doing something illicit and daring, it is about serving the community and teamwork as a form of selflessness for Sentrock.

Sentrock is a member of For The Love crew, a group of friends who came together for the love of graffiti writing, not to get "props" or to "be prideful," but for the love of the art form. The crew is comprised of a DJ, graffiti writers, and breakdancer; similar to the elements of hip-hop, they came together for the love of personal expression. Being a part of the crew gives Sentrock a sense of solidarity with others, and he views his crew and their art form as being community-based, as they help each other without being selfish and they create their pieces to develop the aesthetics of their community.

Sentrock views the pieces that he and his crew create as a way of giving back to the community, as an unselfish act. He will ask permission to paint in an area of the city, but does not want to be told what to paint. He believes that he and his crew are beautifying the neighborhood. Sentrock sees the influence graffiti has on children in the neighborhood who are enraptured by the wonder of color, the skills and craftsmanship the writers possess, and in a way they hero-worship the graffiti artists. He explained:

This is our way of giving back; this is what I have to offer the world. Like when we are painting and the kids walk by and they see our painting, all the colors, and we write cool things, this is our way of giving back to them. We are proud of our community, proud of our neighborhood. When you do graffiti, the art form of it, it is a very unselfish act to do that.



## Disruption of the Status Quo

Sentrock believes that both illegal and legal forms of graffiti are a disruption of the status quo of society. He believes that when the general public views graffiti it “keeps them on their toes.” Sentrock wants to shape his city in a way that is different from how those in positions of power have formed it, by doing graffiti pieces instead of seeing only blank walls. Sentrock believes that by doing graffiti art pieces he encourages viewers to go beyond a “consumerist mindset that wants everyone to conform.” This idea of making society question itself can be seen as another way of giving back to the community, that disruption of society is actually healthy for all. According to Sentrock,

It [graffiti] is something that goes against the grain, or always pushes the envelope of what people are thinking or how people react in society. In a sense I think that is good because it keeps society on its toes or not just so black and white.

Intertwined with this idea is the concept that graffiti and graffiti art is an area of life that is free from authority, that the artist can do what he wants to do “without anyone shutting you down, telling you this is the right way and this is the wrong way.” There is room for many styles and manners of creating graffiti art, and this freedom from constraint is personally liberating for Sentrock.

## Graffiti Art as an Equalizer

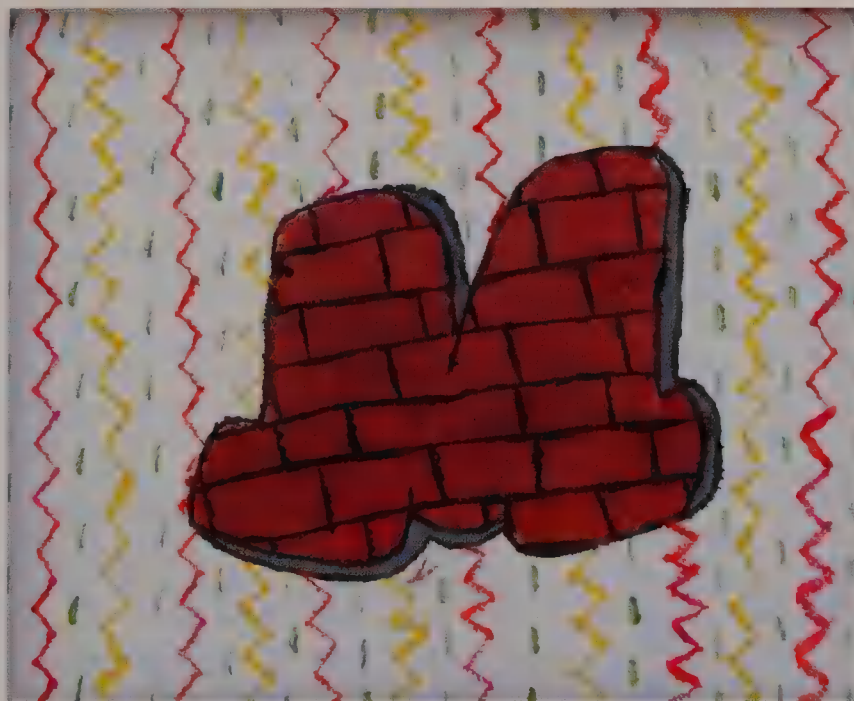
Sentrock did not have access to many art programs while growing up, so graffiti was his creative outlet. He sees graffiti as a form of expression that was developed by low-income adolescents with limited opportunities, a creative expression that was developed in and for the ghetto. “We [low-income Hispanics] are more limited than others, with less options.” Sentrock views learning about graffiti art as a means to overcome the difficulties and limitations faced by low-income children. “When we shine don’t dim us down because we’ve seen enough darkness” (from the video “The Rise Project and Why”). This viewpoint, that graffiti art is a way of equalizing disparities in opportunity for enrichment including developing individual students’ voices and identities, is what drives Sentrock’s teaching. It is another form of giving back to his community.

## Importance of Graffiti Art in Education

Sentrock believes that teaching students graffiti art is an important way for youth to find their voices and identities. Graffiti art encompasses many styles: wildstyle, bubble, block, and 3-D, to name a few. Because there is so much room for improvisation, graffiti art is a way to teach students to “think outside the box” and not simply repeat what others have accomplished. The idea that there is not a right or wrong way to do

graffiti is significant for Sentrock, and he encourages students’ individualism through the development of their own styles.

Sentrock also ties his teaching to his commitment to give back to his community. He believes that some youth are going to do graffiti and perhaps get into “the graffiti lifestyle,” which he says is “crazy.” He himself lived this type of lifestyle for a while, going out late at night, putting up pieces and tagging, dodging drug dealers, prostitutes, and the police. He believes that people who are caught up in that lifestyle are often of a “cross-out” mentality: that they are into having one crew cross out another crew’s work, which could lead to retaliation. He finally got caught tagging his high school, and became fed up with the “drama” of the illicit graffiti lifestyle, which became turning points for him to focus on working on canvases and seeking permission to paint on public spaces. Sentrock will answer students truthfully about his past if asked if he has ever done illegal graffiti, but he shares his conviction that students should “use it [graffiti art] as a platform to do things in life; don’t do things [such as vandalism or living the illicit graffiti lifestyle] that will hold you back or confine you.” He believes that graffiti art is one way to improve society and the lives of youth.



*M.* by a 7th-grade student. Photo by the author.

*The Letter E.* by a 7th-grade student. Photo by the author.



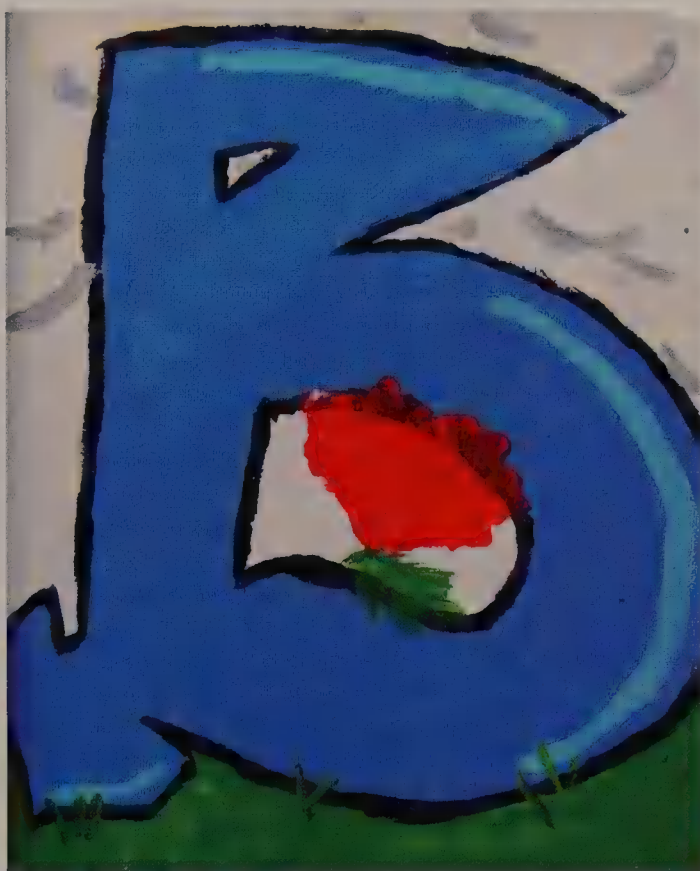


Figure 6. *B.* by a 7th-grade student. Photo by the author.

Art educators can utilize Sentrock's teaching about the delineation of vandalism from graffiti art, creating a space for art students to express themselves through graffiti in a positive manner.

## Data Analysis

Critical pedagogy such as that advocated by visual culture educators focuses on lived experiences with the intention to disrupt, contest, and transform systems of oppression. It challenges individuals to investigate, comprehend, and intercede in the matrix of connections between schooling, beliefs, authority, and culture (Tavin, 2003). Sentrock's motivation to teach about graffiti art is anchored in a belief that the students he teaches have already had as part of their lived experiences exposure to graffiti and the graffiti lifestyle, as a result of the lack of opportunities for low-income youth. He believes that graffiti art is an art form that contests systems of authority and conformity, and that teaching graffiti art to students is one way to disrupt a system that all too often teaches mindless obedience and conventionality. He asks students to question their notions about what is cool, and what are truly effective ways of changing power structures; that instead of focusing on tagging and crossing out, to concentrate on using their talents and interests to further their communities and their personal lives. Sentrock uses his graffiti art as a method to challenge society's conformity and to beautify

and bring pride to his community. He uses his graffiti art teaching to enrich students' lives, encourage their creative thinking, and bring voice and a sense of identity to their individual lives.

This study supports the findings of Bowen's (1999) study of Toronto graffiti writers who asked art teachers to consider how students' realities affect their identities and forms of self-expression and guide them toward positive applications of art forms that best express their ideas. However, Kan (2001) found that adolescents could not distinguish between graffiti and vandalism. Kan found that it was confusing for students that the art world and society would send contradictory messages; one highly honors the achievement of individual graffiti artists, while the other prohibits and prosecutes the work. I found in this study that if students are taught the difference between vandalism and graffiti, they gain a clear understanding of the difference. After Sentrock's visiting artist residency, there was no more tagging at the school for the rest of the academic year. Later, when asked what was their favorite art project during the school year, many students answered "graffiti art." When asked to explain why, students' responses included

that Sentrock was cool, that he taught them something important, and that he was part of their world.

During the one class period that Sentrock spent with each of my 7th- and 8th-grade classes he guided them in creating one letter of the alphabet in their own personal style. Sentrock taught students the basic vocabulary and strategy of creating wildstyle pieces. He instructed students to make their letters look 3-D, then outline or "shell" the letter, and create a highlight. Using acrylic paints, students painted with brushes on canvas board as they followed his direction and inspiration. The classes were unusually quiet as they focused intently on creating their letters. Students who normally were disengaged during class were engaged in this unit due to the connection it made to what was important to them: street art.

Sentrock's personality, youth, and hip-hop style resonated with my students. He dressed like the b-boy that he is, and used words like "dope" and "sick" to pronounce that something was positive or worthwhile—words that are part of my students' daily speech. He brought something from the students' daily lives, that they appreciate and value, into an educational context with positive messages



of “be yourself,” “don’t limit yourself through your actions,” and “find ways to develop your voice.” His teaching aligns with values proclaimed by visual culture education: make connections to students’ lived experiences, and ask them to think about popular culture through multiple perspectives and meaningful production (Tavin, 2003).

## Conclusions

Sites of visual culture are important in students’ lives. Because of this, more cases need to be developed that locate the content of visual images in the daily experiences of youth so that the theory of visual culture

education can be matched with practical sites of visual culture education. Art educators in K-12 settings need more practical examples of how visual culture education can be applied to their teaching situations. Visual culture education encourages taking the context of students’ lives into consideration when developing art curricula. In this case, the artist/educator Sentrock focuses on one aspect of some students’ daily experiences: graffiti. Art educators can utilize Sentrock’s teaching about the delineation of vandalism from graffiti art, creating a space for art students to express themselves through graffiti in a positive manner.

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## AUTHOR NOTE

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> A *soul clap* is a steady clapping of hands that a breakdancer can dance to.
- <sup>2</sup> *B-boy* is a slang term for a male breakdancer.
- <sup>3</sup> High art is traditionally defined as being seen by experts as timeless and deserving recognition in the art community. Low art is often characterized by having a specific place in history that is a sign of the times.
- <sup>4</sup> Spray paint can be toxic and is not recommended for use by school-age children.
- <sup>5</sup> To view a video on The Rise Project, see <http://vimeo.com/25249321>
- <sup>6</sup> As an independent researcher, I am not responsible to a review board of an institution. However, I adhere to the ethical codes of my profession that the research participant be protected from harm and not deceived (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). I used a consent form which provided for the protection of identity (which the research participant declined), informed the research participant about the study's purpose, allowed the research participant to withdraw at any time, and allowed him to give his consent willingly to the research project. I explained that I would be writing for a professional journal, and the audience would be other art educators.
- <sup>7</sup> All quotes are from personal communication with Sentrock on June 22, 2011.





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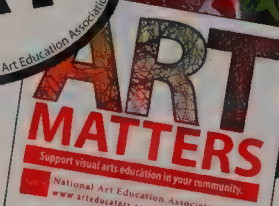
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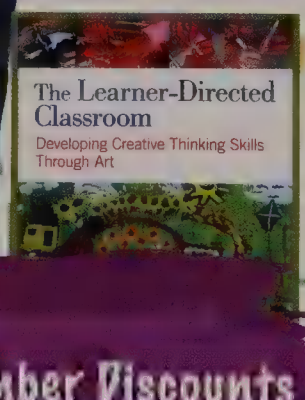
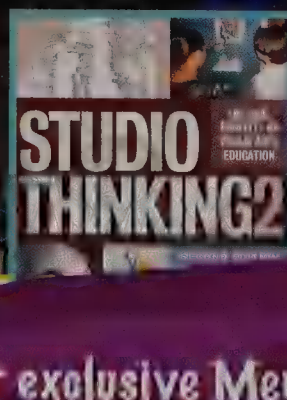
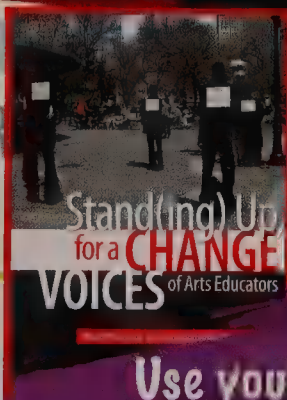
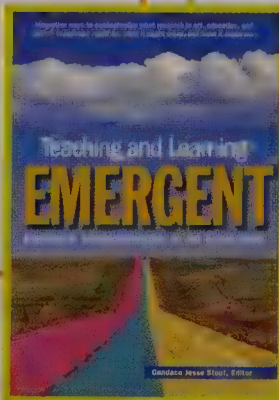
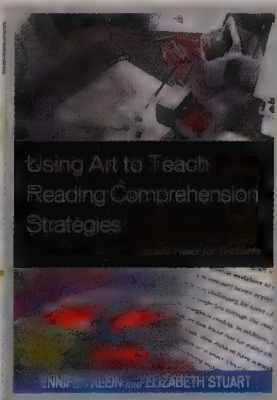


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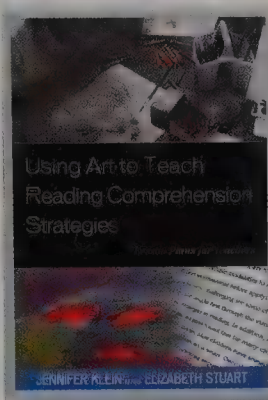
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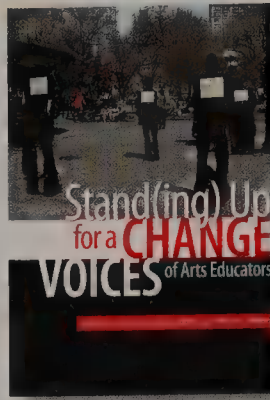
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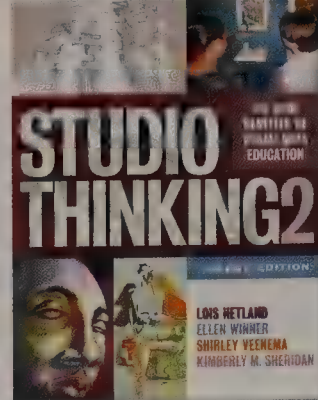
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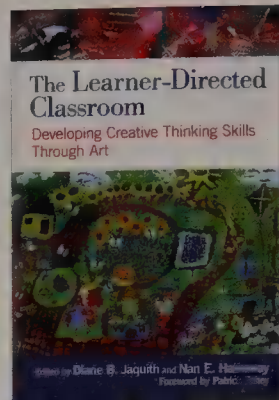
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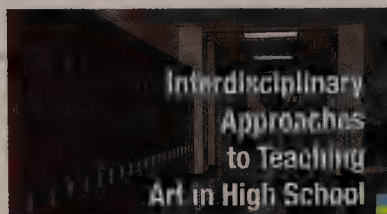


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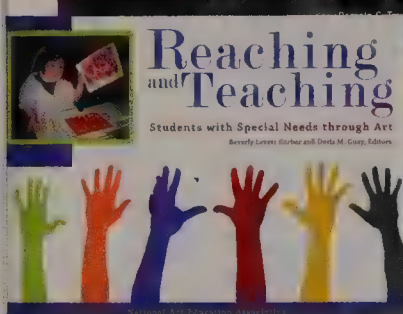


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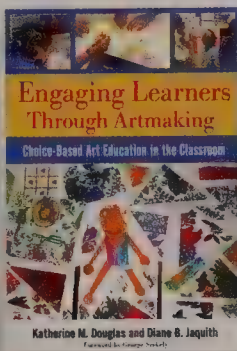
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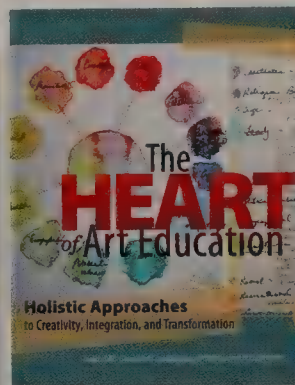
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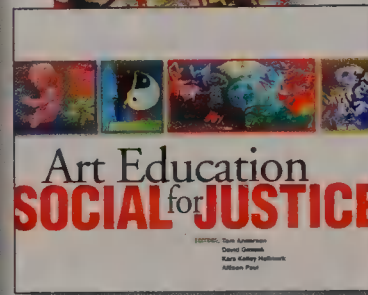
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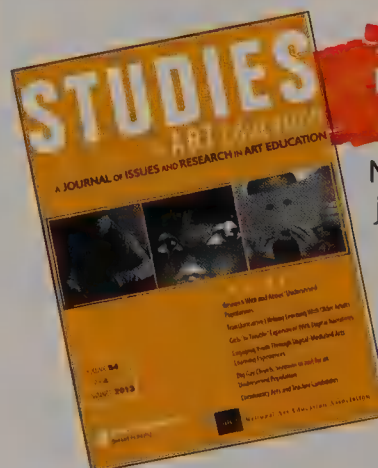
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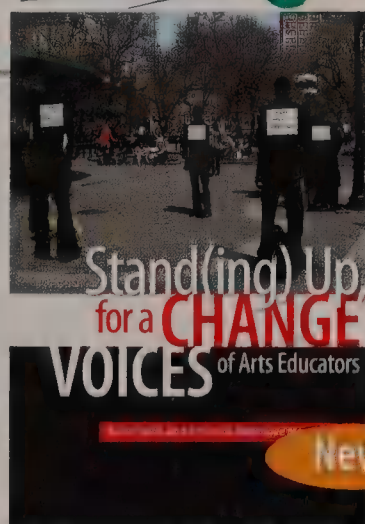
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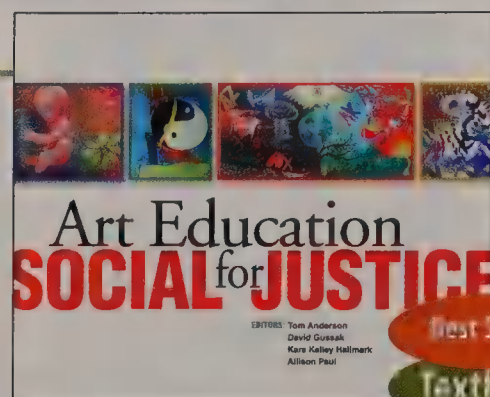
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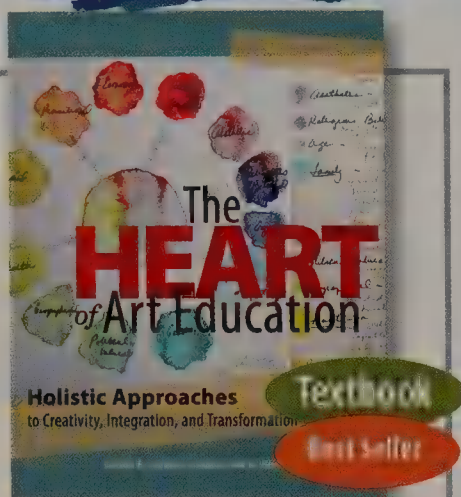
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“‘Empowerment’... seems a very appropriate name today for the manner in which working with materials, learning how to represent ideas, thinking through a medium, and engaging with works of art can produce **A PERSONAL SENSE OF POWER AND CAPACITY.**”

—Karen Lee Carroll, Dean, Center for Art Education, Maryland Institute College of Art

## No. 315

### The Heart of Art Education: Holistic Approaches to Creativity, Integration, and Transformation

LAUREL H. CAMPBELL and  
SEYMOUR SIMMONS III, EDITORS

Although a growing body of literature on holistic teaching and learning abounds, little has been written specifically for art educators. In the visual arts, holistic education begins with the recognition that each dimension of the individual can be educationally involved in making and/or studying art. This **focus on comprehensive, or holistic, development through meaning-making** is “the heart of art education.”

This anthology showcases an array of philosophies, methods, and lessons learned as teachers strive to **meet the holistic needs of children and young adults.** Focusing on meaning-making in the art room by viewing and critiquing art from other cultures, fostering harmonious relationships with nature, and examining transformative and integrated learning techniques, this volume provides insights for educators at all levels.

328 pgs. (2012) ISBN 978-1-890160-53-1  
\$48, NAEA Members \$39

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“At the end of the day, good teaching remains an intimate, personal, and idiosyncratic profession, and **WILLINGNESS TO BE A THOUGHTFUL, ONGOING, AND ENERGETIC LEARNER** is paramount.”

—Judith Burton, Editor  
Professor of Art Education, Columbia University Teachers College

## No. 316

### Conversations in Art: The Dialectics of Teaching and Learning

JUDITH M. BURTON and MARY HAFELI,  
EDITORS

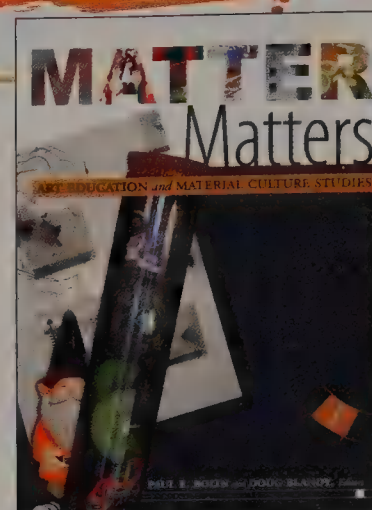
In an innovative, decade-long project to examine how good teachers practice in classroom and museum settings, experienced art educators recorded teachers engaging with students, and later reviewed and critiqued these recordings to compile **“snapshots” of classroom life unlike any documented before.**

This resource is for art teachers and researchers who realize the importance of thinking “outside the box” to grapple with the serious issues and rhetorical definitions clouding the practice of art education. *Conversations* is the work of the Research Task Force on Student Learning, a core group of 20 professional art educators whose diversity of experiences and backgrounds enriched the insights and perspectives, and culminated in the unique personal reflections and writing styles of this lively and engaging resource.

For those interested less in traditional forms of school-based inquiry and more in obtaining a deeper understanding of what a group of selected art educators thought about what they did and why, and how this shaped their philosophy and teaching practice.

288 pgs. (2012) ISBN 978-1-890160-54-8  
\$39, NAEA Members \$32

Table of Contents online!



“The essays in this collection eloquently demonstrate that **ART EDUCATION AND MATERIAL CULTURE, WHEN CONSIDERED TOGETHER, OFFER RICH OPPORTUNITIES** to think in new ways about the promise of art education.”

—Dónal O'Donoghue, Associate Professor and Chair of Art Education, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

## No. 229

### Matter Matters: Art Education and Material Culture Studies

PAUL E. BOLIN and DOUG BLANDY,  
EDITORS

Discussion regarding the study of material culture within art education has increased, yet more conversation about the collaborative alignment of these areas needs to occur. This book provides a forum and focal point for such exchange. Chapters address theoretical and practical issues, ideas, and questions related to the study of and teaching about a wide range of objects and expressions in our contemporary world.

*Matter Matters* provides readers with theoretical perspectives and **practical instructional ideas related to teaching about and through objects and expressions from the surrounding world.** The book is divided into two primary sections: Theoretical Perspectives on Material Culture and Art Education, and Practical Application of Material Culture Studies within Art Education.

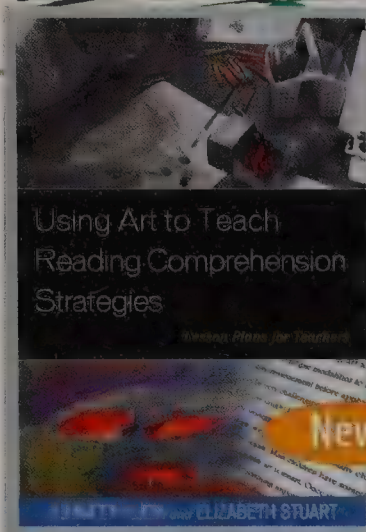
Beyond art and museum educators and graduate students, this book will be of value to those in museum studies, anthropology, American studies, folklore, popular culture, media studies, history, art history, and other curriculum development and classroom instruction.

170 pgs. (2011) ISBN 978-1-890160-51-7  
\$42, NAEA Members \$35



## READING & ART

Table of Contents online!



"A valuable resource **FOR ALL ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM TEACHERS** looking for an integrated approach to teaching reading/language arts in the visual arts."

—F. Robert Sabol, Professor of Visual and Performing Arts, Purdue University

**No. 324**

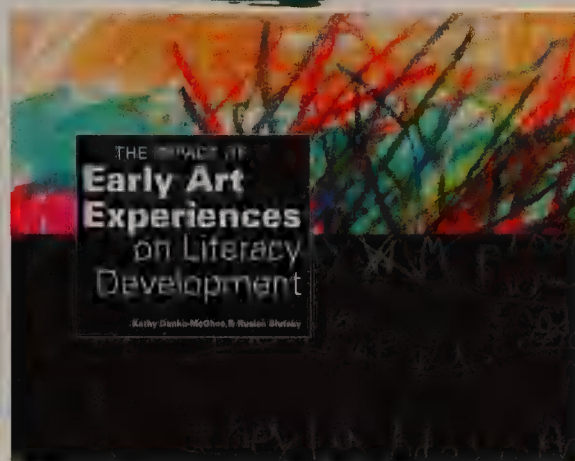
### Using Art to Teach Reading Comprehension Strategies: Lesson Plans for Teachers

JENNIFER KLEIN and ELIZABETH STUART

Art teachers and classroom teachers alike benefit from this easy-to-use collaborative resource. Inspired by **the benefits of infusing art into reading and vice versa**, the authors draw upon their elementary education experience to help teachers create **lessons that teach comprehension strategies, meet Core Standards, and help students gain skills** to use outside the classroom. This teacher-friendly, integrated approach to teaching reading/language arts and the visual arts can provide the framework for students to move easily from a text-free environment to a text environment.

*Using Art to Teach Reading Comprehension Strategies* presents six strategies for using art to teach reading comprehension: Making Connections, Questioning, Visualizing, Inferring, Determining Importance, and Synthesizing. Chapters begin with an overview of the strategy, followed by lesson plans which include the Core Standards that will be met, and the literacy benefits of the lessons. Co-published with Rowman & Littlefield.

112 pgs. (2013) ISBN 978-1-47580-153-8  
\$28, NAEA Members \$25



"The book's timely recognition of multiple definitions of literacy, including the contemporary importance of visual and digital literacies... recognizes both art making and responding to works of art as ways to **BUILD THE LANGUAGE SKILLS THAT ALLOW WRITING AND READING TO EMERGE NATURALLY FROM CHILDREN'S EARLIEST MEANS OF SUSTAINED COMMUNICATION....**"

—Christine Marmé Thompson, Professor of Art Education and Art Education Graduate Coordinator, Penn State School of Visual Art, University Park

**No. 297**

### The Impact of Early Art Experiences on Literacy Development

KATHY DANKO-MCGHEE and RUSLAN SLUTSKY

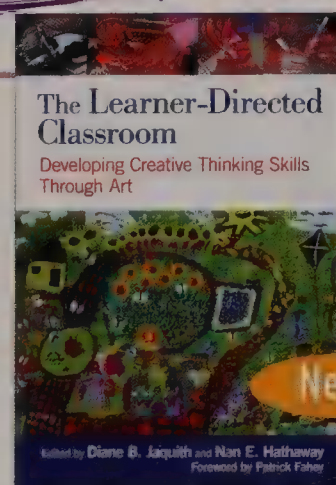
A compelling look at the link between children's artwork and literacy development, this is an easy-to-read, indispensable primer for parents and educators alike. By providing a range of art experiences and alternative ways to teach children critical thinking and visual perception skills, **the authors paint a vivid picture of the role that the visual arts play in early childhood development:** "It is clear that a pedagogical shift must take place in our homes and schools if we are to meet the literacy needs of today's young learners. This requires thinking 'out of the box' and coming up with new ways to deal with an old problem."

*The Impact of Early Art Experiences on Literacy Development* lays the foundation for rethinking the way that we engage young children in early literacy learning. Includes over 60 step-by-step art activities designed to enhance early literacy.

122 pgs. (2007) ISBN 978-1-890160-37-1  
\$32, NAEA Members \$25

## STUDENT-DIRECTED

Table of Contents online!



"This volume is filled with **PRACTICAL TIPS AND HANDS-ON ADVICE** aimed at improving self-directed student learning. Any classroom teacher interested in helping students learn, discover, and create will want to read and reread this book."

—James C. Kaufman, Professor of Psychology, CA State University, San Bernardino, and Editor, International Journal of Creativity and Problem Solving

**No. 326**

### The Learner-Directed Classroom: Developing Creative Thinking Skills Through Art

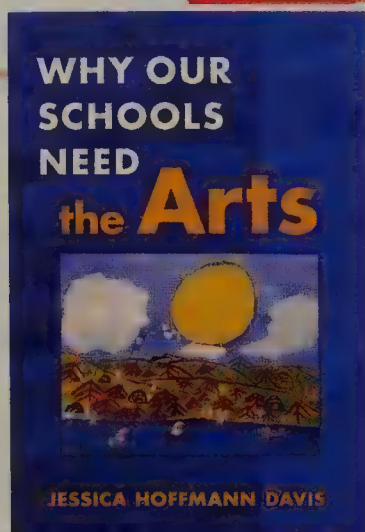
DIANE B. JAQUITH and NAN E. HATHAWAY, EDITORS

Educators at all levels want students to develop habits of **self-directed learning and critical problem-solving skills that encourage ownership and growth**. Practicing art educators (PreK–16) offer both a comprehensive framework for understanding student-directed learning, and concrete pedagogical strategies to implement student-direct learning activities. Research-based assessment strategies provide educators with evidence of student mastery and achievement. Teachers who structure self-directed learning activities can facilitate effective differentiation as students engage in the curriculum at their level. Published by Teachers College Press.

- Guidance for implementing a learner-directed program.
- Attention to the needs of specific groups of students.
- Insights into reflective practice and strategies for assessment of learning.

162 pgs. (2012)  
ISBN 978-0-8077-5362-0  
\$33, NAEA Members \$30





"Equips educators and advocates alike with a rich vocabulary and clear examples of **HOW TO TEACH AND HOW TO MAKE THE CASE FOR THE ESSENTIAL AND UNIQUE PLACE OF THE ARTS** in the school curriculum."

—Richard J. Deasy, Director, Arts Education Partnership, Washington, DC

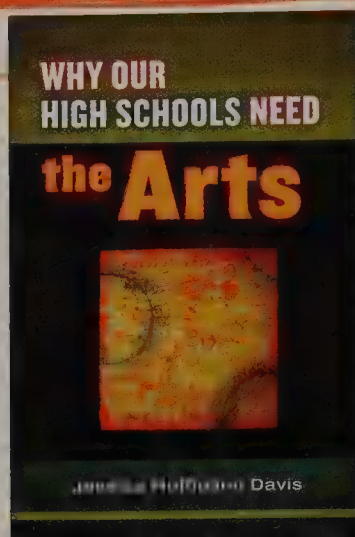
## No. 302 Why Our Schools Need the Arts

JESSICA HOFFMANN DAVIS

What would happen if we were allowed to embrace the arts and not have to apologize for it? This pioneering work dares to chart a new path—one that stops justifying the arts as useful in teaching "core" subjects, and **argues instead for the powerful lessons the arts can provide students.**

Davis is a cognitive developmental psychologist and founder of the Arts in Education Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She provides a set of principles and tools for arts advocates and instructors already working to secure a strong place for the arts in education, and reaches out to those who care deeply about education but have yet to consider what the arts uniquely provide. She acknowledges and respects those who advocate for testing to provide assurance that students are learning as well as those who want students to have knowledge and experience that defies measurement and encourages thinking "outside the box" of standardized curriculum. Co-published by NAEA and Teachers College Press.

150 pgs. (2008) ISBN 0-80774834-3  
\$22, NAEA Members \$20



"Clearly outlines **THE ARTS EDUCATION STRATEGY OF ENORMOUS POWER AND APPEAL** that I believe could be game changing."

—William Strickland, President and CEO, Manchester Bidwell Corporation, and author of Make the Impossible Possible

## No. 318 Why Our High Schools Need the Arts

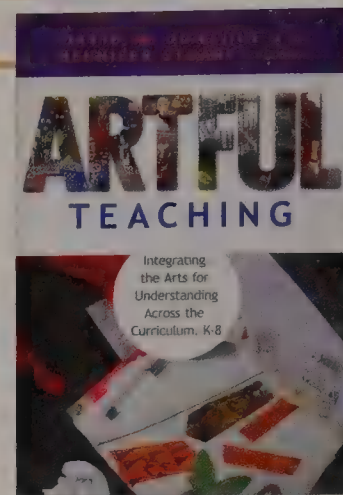
JESSICA HOFFMANN DAVIS

Jessica Hoffmann Davis addresses the alarming dropout rate in our high schools and presents a thoughtful, evidence-based argument that increasing arts education in the high school curriculum will keep kids in school.

Davis shares compelling voices of teachers and their adolescent learners to demonstrate how **courses in the arts are relevant and valuable to students who have otherwise become disenfranchised from school.** This important book points the way toward rescuing the American high school from the inside out by ensuring that all students benefit from the compelling and essential learning opportunities that the arts uniquely provide.

This timely resource **will inform the uninitiated, change the minds of doubters, and fuel the fight** of those already committed to arts-related school reform. Co-published by NAEA and Teachers College Press.

128 pgs. (2011)  
ISBN 978-0-8077-5286-9  
\$24, NAEA Members \$22



"I find the result of these authors' efforts stunning. The volume stands as a **TESTAMENT TO WHAT EDUCATORS MIGHT OFFER TO STUDENTS AND SOCIETY** if we can move beyond our insular walls and the hierarchies that they breed."

—Lois Hetland, Professor of Art Education at Massachusetts College of Art and Design and a research associate at Harvard/ Project Zero

## No. 257 Artful Teaching: Integrating the Arts for Understanding Across the Curriculum, K-8

DAVID M. DONAHUE and JENNIFER STUART, EDITORS

Exemplary arts integration projects and practices across the K-8 curriculum are shared in this resource. Rather than providing formulas or scripts to be followed, **the authors describe how the arts provide an entry point for gaining insight into why and how students learn.**

The book highlights examples of public school teachers who are integrating visual arts, music, drama, and dance with subject matter in English, social studies, science, and math. As a guide to a school reform model, it also explores intensive teacher-education and principal-training programs in several higher education institutions and offers concrete ideas for educators seeking to strengthen their own skills. Co-published by NAEA and Teachers College Press.

181 pgs. (2010) ISBN 978-0-8077-5080-3  
\$25, NAEA Members \$22

Do you have NAEA authors speaking at your event? Would you like their book available to sell and to have signed?  
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Are you interested in obtaining a desk copy?  
E-mail: [deskcopy@arteducators.org](mailto:deskcopy@arteducators.org)



# MULTICULTURAL RESOURCES



Table of Contents online!

"The East Asian tradition opens up such **WAYS OF CONSIDERING ART AND ARTMAKING THAT PROFITABLY CHALLENGE STUDENTS' ASSUMPTIONS**, directed toward the art not only of that region but sometimes, just as important, of the familiar West."

—Richard Bullen, Senior Lecturer in Art History and Theory, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand

## No. 314 Teaching Asian Art: Content, Context, and Pedagogy

SHENG KUAN CHUNG, EDITOR

*Teaching Asian Art* provides American art teachers with cultural insights and historical/spiritual perspectives through lessons inspired by Asian art, allowing them to make meaningful connections across the curriculum. The authors include prominent American, Asian, and international scholars and educators who either have first-hand knowledge of, or are cultural insiders of, the respective Asian artistic practice that each chapter explores.

Designed primarily for those seeking to expand their students' knowledge of Asian art, this unique collection also provides a resource for in-service art teachers who desire to **enhance and enrich their multicultural art curricula**. It serves as a comprehensive reference text for college students taking courses in Asian art appreciation/history and non-Western art.

University faculty from other disciplines who are interested in Asian studies and Asian aesthetics, or who are teaching multicultural art education or Asian art history/appreciation courses, will also find this book beneficial.

246 pgs. (2012) ISBN 978-1-890160-52-4 \$46, NAEA Members \$39

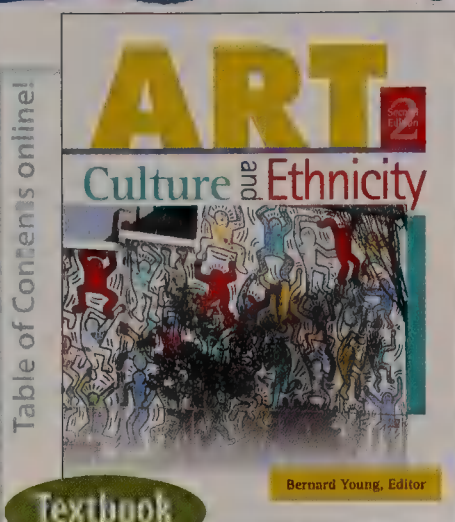


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"Given the globalization phenomenon that has evolved since the mid-19th century, and emerging interest in world culture, this is must reading for educators in general, and arts educators in particular. ... **NEW PARADIGMS FOR READERS INTERESTED IN ADDRESSING ART, CULTURE, AND ETHNICITY.**"

—Dr. Mac Arthur Goodwin, Former NAEA President, Executive Director, Goodwin's Arts Consulting, PC, Columbia, SC

## No. 205 Art, Culture, and Ethnicity, 2nd Edition

BERNARD YOUNG, EDITOR

Groundbreaking when first published in 1990, *Art, Culture, and Ethnicity* has been updated and **expanded to reflect today's changing cultural landscape and global consciousness** about issues such as immigration and the assimilation of and contributions by racial and ethnic minorities to visual culture.

Leading art educators provide new research in the field and **discuss and explore examples from diverse groups** including Mexican, Latin American, African, Islamic, and Native American. Issues covered include: messages movies convey about immigration; how teaching Native American Indigenous arts can stir debate but lead to greater understanding; the challenge of explaining Muslim reluctance toward figural art images; the definition of Africentricity and how it impacts today's culture and education; and the contributions of digitally mediated visual culture as introduced into a traditional art education environment.

180 pgs. (2011)  
ISBN 978-1-890160-50-0  
\$39, NAEA Members \$32



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"Valuable and timely for today's students, educators, and researchers in understanding the global phenomenon of visual pop-culture and its implications for art education... **A GREAT COMMUNICATIVE TOOL FOR PREDICTING THE NEAR FUTURE OF GLOBAL YOUTH CULTURE.**"

—Masami Toku Founder and Director, Shoji Manga Project, and Professor of Art Education, California State University, Chico, CA

## No. 305 Globalization, Art, and Education

ELIZABETH MANLEY DELACRUZ, ALICE ARNOLD, ANN KUO, and MICHAEL PARSONS, EDITORS

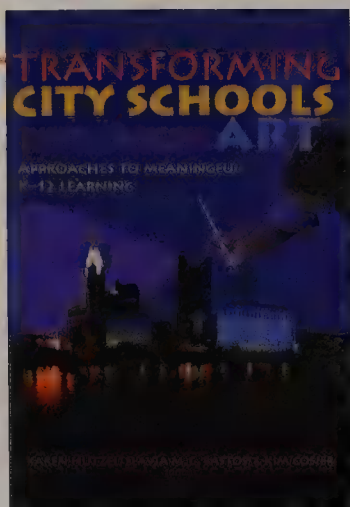
As Editor Elizabeth Delacruz notes, understanding "globalization" starts with the concept, "I am a citizen of the world," an active agent of global civil society, and it envisions a future in which... imagination, social justice, citizen polity, honesty, and sustainability are firmly embedded in both our world view and daily practices at home."

**Timely research, critical analyses, narrative essays, and case studies from 49 scholars** from all over the world examine how globalization interfaces not only with art and education, but also with local and regional cultural practices and identities, economies, political strategies, and ecological/environmental concerns of people around the world.

This thoughtful resource for 21st-century creative thinkers and globally conscious problem solvers is **a must for college classrooms, academic libraries, and art educators' personal reference collections.**

334 pgs. (2009) ISBN 978-1-890160-43-2 \$65, NAEA Members \$55





"The time is right for this message and for this book that chronicles an active but seldom recognized practice... and **RECONSIDERS THE PLACE OF ART IN CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION AND CULTURE.**"

—Christine Marmé Thompson, Professor of Art Education, Penn State University, State College, PA

### No. 319

## Transforming City Schools Through Art: Approaches to Meaningful K-12 Learning

KAREN HUTZEL, FLÁVIA M. C. BASTOS, and KIM COSIER, EDITORS

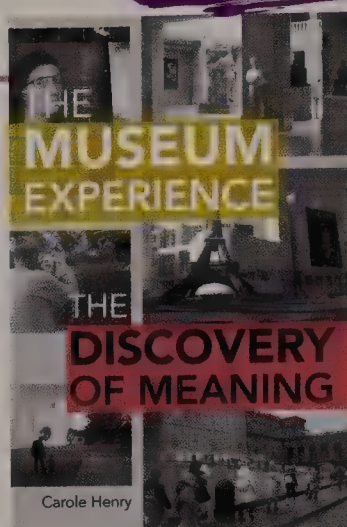
This anthology **places art at the center of meaningful urban education reform.** Providing a fresh perspective on urban education, contributors describe **a positive, asset-based community development model** designed to tap into the teaching/learning potential already available in cities. Teachers will discover how to use the cultural resources at hand to engage students in the processes of critical, imaginative investigation.

*Transforming City Schools Through Art: Approaches to Meaningful K-12 Learning*

- Offers a new vision for urban schools
- Highlights successful models of visual art education for the K-12 classroom
- Describes meaningful, socially concerned teaching practices
- Includes unit plans, a glossary of terms, and online resources

Co-published with Teachers College Press.

182 pgs. (2012) ISBN 978-0-8077-5292-0  
\$30, NAEA Members \$27



"An invaluable resource for all 21st-century art educators within museum and school settings. **PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS THROUGHOUT THE BOOK HELP ENHANCE SIGNIFICANT AND RELEVANT ART EXPERIENCES NEEDED** by all learners in our Visual Age."

—Renee Sandell, Professor, Art Education, School of Art, George Mason University

### No. 310

## The Museum Experience: The Discovery of Meaning

CAROLE HENRY

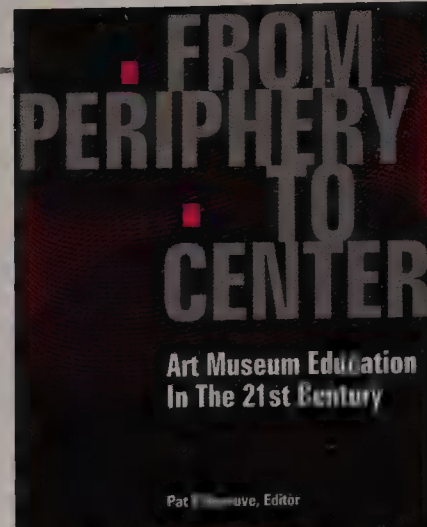
How can museum educators continually rethink what approaches to exhibition and education stimulate the most meaningful experiences and relevant connections for each visitor?

*The Museum Experience* both asks and answers this and other questions with the aim of providing insights into how to shape more "user-friendly" museum practices that offer refreshing opportunities for observation, reflective thinking, and creative discovery.

This book serves as an introductory textbook for understanding the educational role of art museums, varying contexts in which art is viewed, relevance of aesthetic experience, and strategies to help visitors understand a work of art.

Chapters conclude with "Implications for Practice" to aid in creating more meaningful experiences for visitors of all ages, genders, and cultures. **This book can help K-12 educators learn to collaborate on learning projects with art museums in their communities.**

106 pgs. (2010) ISBN 978-1-890160-46-3  
\$32, NAEA Members \$26



"Chapters in this anthology address a full range of topics and issues of concern to contemporary art museum educators, and more importantly, **WELCOME INTO THE DIALOGUE NEW IDEAS, OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH** that can illuminate alternative paths forward."

—E. Louis Lankford, PhD, Des Lee Foundation Endowed Professor in Art Education, The University of Missouri-Saint Louis, and Public Programs and Education at the Saint Louis Art Museum

### No. 298

## From Periphery to Center: Art Museum Education in the 21st Century

PAT VILLENEUVE, EDITOR

*From Periphery to Center* examines museum education from the perspective of 33 authors from the field, resulting in a **collective vision elevating the function of education within museums.** A variety of perspectives throughout this comprehensive collection of essays push further thinking and encourage robust debate. Another dimension comes from the "Many Voices Project"—art museum educators and others with an interest in the field who offered feedback on topics explored throughout the essays. These comments add alternate ideas and expand the discussions.

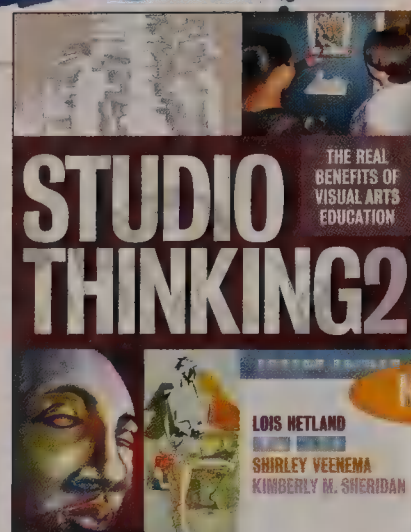
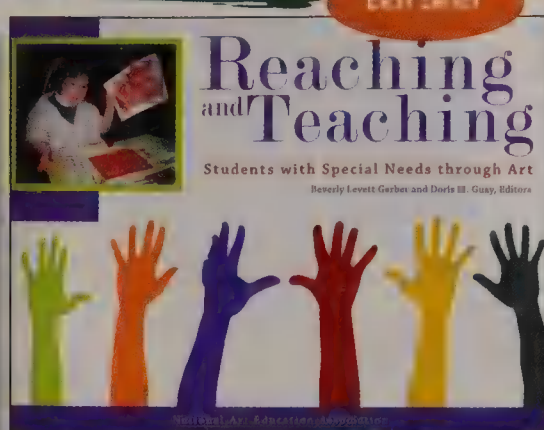
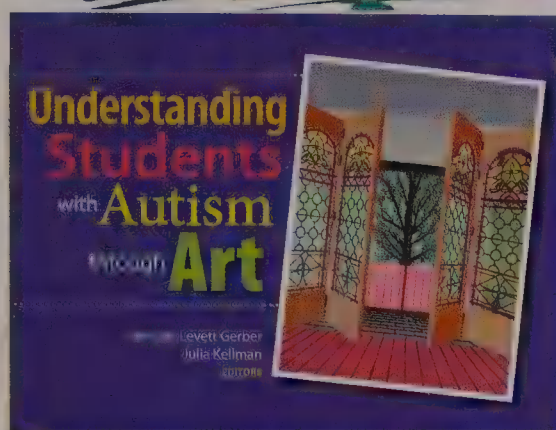
An invaluable resource for museum educators, and a practical textbook for professors and students in museum education programs.

253 pgs. (2007)  
ISBN 978-1-890160-38-8  
\$39, NAEA Members \$32

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Fax: 703-860-2960 (see form on page 16) Or call: 800-299-8321





"A groundbreaking book that focuses attention on **THE IMPORTANCE OF ART EDUCATION IN THE LIVES OF INDIVIDUALS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM**... Through drawing skills, I went from being a child with autism to a successful designer of livestock handling facilities. Half the cattle in North America are handled in facilities I have designed."

—Temple Grandin, Professor of Animal Science, Colorado State University; internationally recognized autism advocacy speaker

"With a blessed absence of theoretical jargon, this wise book arouses our interest and awakens our concern over **AN ASPECT OF SCHOOL LIFE THAT RECEIVES MUCH LESS ATTENTION THAN IT DESERVES.**"

—Judith Burton, Teachers College, Columbia University

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New!

"[The authors] have set out to show **WHAT IT MEANS TO TAKE EDUCATION IN THE ARTS SERIOUSLY**, in its own right."

—The New York Times

## No. 296

### Reaching and Teaching Students with Special Needs through Art

BEVERLY LEVETT GERBER and DORIS M. GUAY, EDITORS

*Reaching and Teaching* provides an overview of special needs students in the art room. It is written for art educators and those who value the arts for students with special needs, and provides current definitions and descriptions for specific special needs groups and recommends teaching strategies. **Art lesson adaptations, behavior management strategies, and follow-up activities** are included.

The book addresses school-wide concerns: collaboration among educators and school staff; art therapy and therapeutic teaching; paraeducators in the art room; and resources for the arts for special needs students. Readers are also given step-by-step directions to obtain funding in order to expand their own teaching opportunities.

222 pgs. (2006) ISBN 1-890160-36-9  
\$35, NAEA Members \$28

## No. 312

### Understanding Students with Autism through Art

BEVERLY LEVETT GERBER and JULIA KELLMAN, EDITORS

Classroom educators at all levels have been presented with new challenges and opportunities by great increases in the number of students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). This book, written for preservice teachers and for practitioners in the field, shares the expertise of professionals from the fields of art education, special education, art therapy, museum education, and medical research. It **highlights teachers' stories, avoids excessive professional jargon, and provides proven examples of successful lessons and teaching/learning strategies** in the classroom as well as in one-on-one settings.

The book includes discussion questions and a helpful guide of annotated resources for inspiration, professional practice, recognition, and funding. *Understanding Students with Autism through Art* is a valuable resource and practical reference that will inspire parents, teachers, and all who work with students on the spectrum diagnosed with autism or Asperger's syndrome.

174 pgs. (2010) ISBN 978-1-890160-48-7  
\$35, NAEA Members \$28

## No. 325

### Studio Thinking 2: The Real Benefits of Visual Arts Education, Second Edition

LOIS HETLAND, ELLEN WINNER, SHIRLEY VEENEMA, and KIMBERLY M. SHERIDAN

Policymakers, art teachers, and educators in other disciplines can discover the positive effects of arts education. This best-selling resource **expands on the groundbreaking research of its first edition**, and includes insight from educators who have successfully used the Studio Structure for Learning to improve student learning across the curriculum.

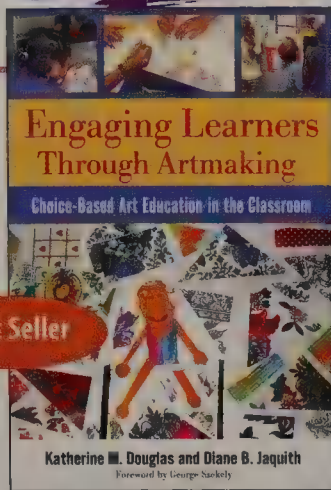
*Studio Thinking 2* will help advocates **explain arts education to policymakers**, help art teachers develop and refine their teaching and assessment practices, and assist educators in other disciplines to learn from existing practices in arts education. Co-published with Teachers College Press.

#### New material includes:

- Exhibitions as a fourth Studio Structure for Learning
- Explanation and examples of the dispositional elements of each Habit
- A chart aligning Habits to the English Language Arts and Mathematics Common Core
- Descriptions of how the Framework has been used across arts and non-arts disciplines

164 pgs. (2013) ISBN 978-0-8077-5435-1  
\$33, NAEA Members \$30





"Clearly explained, highly informed of current research, **FULL OF THE DETAILS THAT REAL TEACHERS REQUIRE FOR THE REALITIES THEY FACE EVERY DAY**, this book should make an immediate and enduring contribution."

—Peter London, Professor, Emeritus,  
University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth

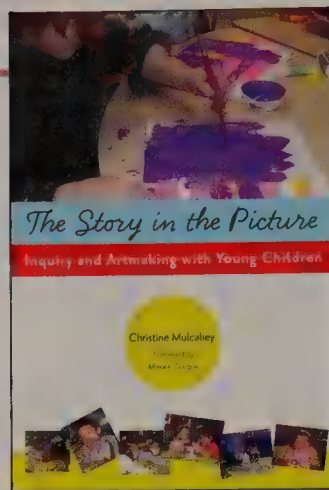
**No. 308**

## Engaging Learners Through Artmaking: Choice-Based Art Education in the Classroom

KATHERINE M. DOUGLAS and  
DIANE B. JAQUITH

This dynamic resource details the philosophy, rationale, and implementation of choice-based authentic art education in elementary and middle schools. To do the work of artists, **children need opportunities to behave, think, and perform as artists**. The heart of this curriculum is to facilitate independent learning in studio centers designed to support student choices in subject matter and media. The authors address theory, instruction, assessment, and advocacy in a user-friendly format that includes color photos of classroom set-ups and student work, sample demonstrations, and reflections on activities. Published by Teachers College Press.

128 pgs. (2009) ISBN 0-8077-4976-1  
\$22, NAEA Members \$20



"This book has the capacity to have a profound impact on how art is viewed by educators by **CHANGING THE ART EXPERIENCE FROM ONE OF INSIGNIFICANCE TO ONE THAT CONTRIBUTES GREATLY** to the cognitive growth of the child."

—Sharon Shaffer, PhD, Executive Director,  
Smithsonian Early Enrichment Center,  
Washington, DC

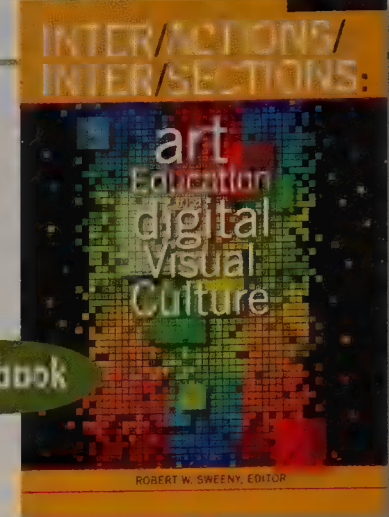
**No. 309**

## The Story in the Picture: Inquiry and Artmaking with Young Children

CHRISTINE MULCAHEY, with Foreword  
by MAXINE GREENE

This book looks at the work of a variety of artists and demonstrates that **using fine art reproductions in the early childhood curriculum allows children to construct their own meanings**, teaches diversity, fosters thinking skills, and encourages storytelling. The author, a professor at Rhode Island College and a preK-5 art specialist, includes lesson ideas, examples of activities, and photographs of children working and interacting with one another and with works of art. Based on the NAEYC and NAEA standards, this educator-friendly resource provides: numerous examples of open-ended arts experiences using reproductions of fine art from many different genres, periods, cultures, and sources; art concepts to be used with children according to their developmental readiness; and **easy-to-implement lesson ideas** designed to encourage educators to create their own to fit in with their regular early childhood curriculum. Co-published with Teachers College Press.

120 pgs. (2009) ISBN 0-8077-5007-7  
\$20, NAEA Members \$18



"Opens up a new conversation about the technological possibilities of contemporary art education. Teachers at all levels will help to **PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THE FUTURE BY ADDRESSING THE ISSUES RAISED IN THIS TEXT**."

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**No. 313**

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ROBERT W. SWEENEY, EDITOR

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—Introduction, *Interdisciplinary Approaches to Teaching Art in High School*

No. 226

### Interdisciplinary Approaches to Teaching Art in High School

PAMELA G. TAYLOR, B. STEPHEN CARPENTER II, CHRISTINE BALLENGEE-MORRIS, and BILLIE SESSIONS

The authors present works of art, artmaking skills, and ways of knowing as catalysts for learning across the traditional disciplinary boundaries in high school. Both timely and enduring, this is the book that will inspire and support the work of veteran, new, and preservice high school art educators. The book includes issues, theories, and practices related to high school curriculum, advocacy, classroom management, assessment, cultural understanding, idea-based instructional strategies, team-teaching, technology, visual culture, and student-initiated learning.

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—Lynn Beudert, Professor of Art, Division of Art and Visual Culture Education, University of Arizona

No. 288

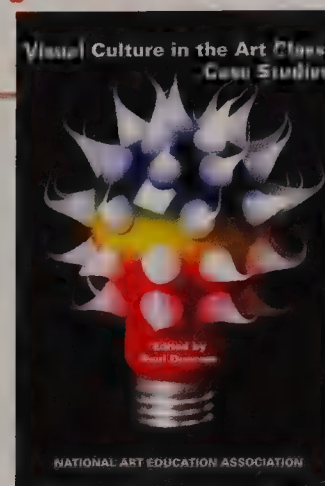
### Teaching Art in Context: Case Studies For Preservice Art Education

SHERI KLEIN, EDITOR

Teaching art is contextual and situation-based; involves making decisions that have moral and political dimensions; and requires having a variety of problem-solving strategies, ongoing reflection and examination of beliefs and biases, and knowledge of pluralistic approaches to curriculum and pedagogy. The 42 case studies in this anthology are **"real" stories about art teaching that can provide preservice art educators with a way to link formal theory (coursework) with practical theory (observation and experience)** through analysis and reflection on art teaching practices.

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—Introduction, *Visual Culture in the Art Class: Case Studies*

No. 264

### Visual Culture in the Art Class: Case Studies

PAUL DUNCUM

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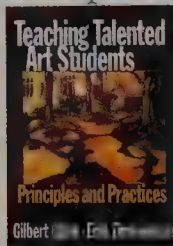
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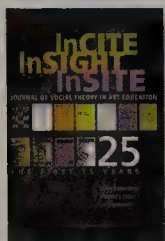
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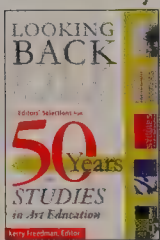
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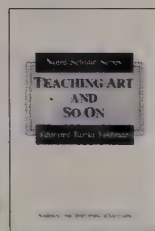
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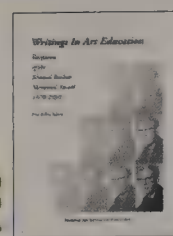
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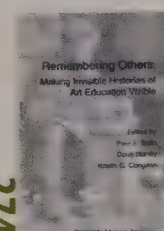
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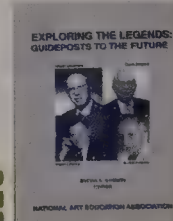
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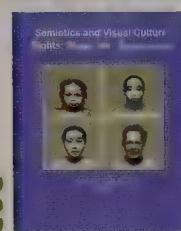
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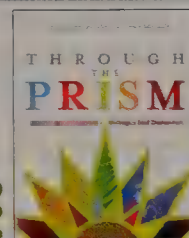
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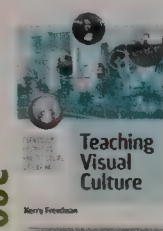
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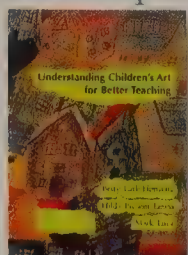


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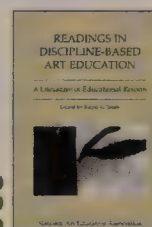
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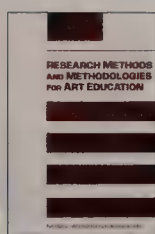
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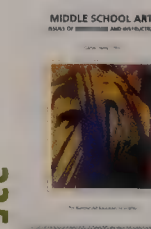
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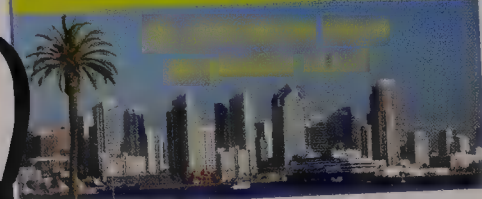
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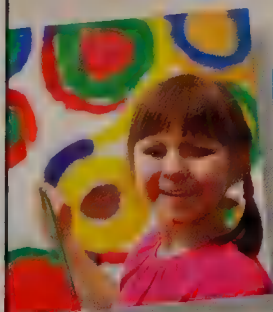
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Divorced, Los Angeles, 2011.

# I PUT THAT THERE

MORLEY

**When I was a kid** I thought that only thugs did graffiti. That is to say that they “did” graffiti in much the same vague way that they “did” drugs.

**A**t the hardware store I saw cases of spray paint, kept in little tiny jails, padlocked and protected from the clutches of sinister teenagers with Mohawks and switchblades and piercings that had little chains connecting their nose to their ears. The first time I saw real graffiti was when I moved to New York City. I was 18, fresh off the bus from Iowa, to attend college at The School of Visual Arts as a screenwriting major. At the time, I responded to it in much the same way as the first time a friend showed me a *Playboy* magazine; stifled awe and a feigned cavalier shrug as if to say: “Oh that? Yeah—that’s no

big deal. I’m totally comfortable with all that. Still, let’s study it for a few hours just ‘cause.”

As fascinated as I was, my untrained suburban eyes couldn’t make out the words or their meaning, and in truth, I didn’t really understand what the point was. No matter how punk I tried to be, the idea of destruction for the sake of destruction or the giddy thrill of petty rebellion didn’t appeal to me and the idea of trucking around an ego so large that one’s goal is simply to scrawl your name on every conceivable object seemed exhausting. Anthropological motives notwithstanding, I





*Justified Existence, Los Angeles, 2012.*

still didn't quite get what it added beyond an urban aesthetic and an anti-authority statement, but I suppose that was good enough for me. My perspective changed when my more cosmopolitan art school peers introduced me to what at the time was being redefined from "vandalism" to "street art." This wasn't just tagging a wall or carving curse words on the stall doors of a public bathroom; this was an actual message. This was art for the sole purpose of offering a gift to anyone who ran across it. As a screenwriting major, this was a revelation. No longer were there a million filters to your audience, a million approvals required before you were able to begin telling your story, and it wasn't a flyer to come to see your band play; it WAS your band playing. The ability to reach the end of an artistic journey in which you create something for a purpose and

then actually get to see it live out that purpose was intoxicating. Another appealing aspect was that it wasn't as much about celebrating the artist, but rather the art itself. Instead of a just seeing a name in bubble letters, it was an image that interacted with the environment; it asked the passerby to approach, to touch, to consider the statement it was making without conditions or setting intellectual standards. This was art by and for the people. It didn't have to be crafted in a studio by an artist deemed professional by the hallowed white walls of a sterile, disinfected gallery or a restrictive museum keeping you 6 feet from the work at all times; it could come from anyone with something to say and the balls to say it. Maybe, I thought, even some wide-eyed kid from Iowa.

Street artist Morley is known for displaying messages of hope and humor, with slogans such as "Let's fall in love like both our parents aren't divorced." You can often see Morley himself—or, a drawing of him—drawing these messages around L.A. His work appears on the streets and can be viewed at [www.IAmMorley.com](http://www.IAmMorley.com)





*Unchased, Los Angeles, 2013.*

## Seeing a few kind words in a harsh and normally indifferent public environment

I started small—silk screening phrases I would later identify as “slogans” onto contact paper. I would then cut these up and stick them around the subways as I would traverse the city. I loved imagining who might see them and what kind of reaction they would have. Just the possibility that my little stickers could have an impact on someone was enough to make me feel gratified and productive—two rare phenomena for the average student at an art school. The best part of all was that I didn’t need permission from anyone, so there was very little risk of rejection or disparagement. If I assumed the best possible response, there was no proof of the contrary. The stickers themselves were benign enough, inoffensive to the more conservative citizen and easy to peel off, they would be the training wheels for what lay ahead for me.

When I moved to Los Angeles, I discovered an entirely different emotional environment. It seemed as though I was surrounded on all sides by either disenfranchised dreamers or marginalized immigrants and the families they struggled to support. We mingled in the streets among the wealthy populous of the world beyond the velvet rope and created a fascinating social concoction. Perhaps this was a myopic way of looking at the city, but after graduating from college and joining the ranks of the wage slaves, it became clearer what I wanted to say and whom I wanted to say it to. I quickly discovered that the majority of L.A.’s inhabitants neglect public transportation, so I decided my artwork needed to be bigger in order to be visible from a passing car or a speeding bike. Additionally, it was then that I decided I wanted to give a name and a face

to the voice. I wanted to create the comfort of familiarity and recognition. I wanted the people to know who it was that was writing to them. To me, using myself as the model was the only choice; it was an attempt to bring more humanity and personal investment to each poster. I wanted to stand by the words in a literal way, instead of just a figurative one. With no experience to speak of with a spray can or a stencil, I opted for the wheatpaste method most associated in recent days with Shepard Fairey’s Obey campaign. This involved a cheap paste made with white flour, shellacked over a poster printed at any local copy shop.

When I began the postering, it hadn’t occurred to me that it could be anything more than a hobby. Something to satiate my desire to create and express myself artistically





*Something To Fight For, Los Angeles, 2012.*

ave the words a much more useful purpose.

while continuing to pursue my screenwriting ambition and work whatever day job was paying my bills. It hadn't been my goal to make a name for myself as a street artist, to be embraced by street art aficionados, or to figure out a way to monetize the work itself. I really just wanted to encourage people like me with humor, hope, and confessional anecdotes. In some ways I thought my work would be almost protected from becoming commercialized because the true value of the statements themselves are so easy to transport. You can describe something visual, but you'll never truly be able to verbalize the image itself. With my work, you can easily just remember the phrase and draw it up whenever you want to. You don't have to remember a shade of yellow in a sunflower or the expressive subtleties of

a smile. For me, the only true value I could imagine in my work was the setting. Seeing a few kind words in a harsh and normally indifferent public environment gave the words a much more useful purpose. The first time someone offered to buy my work on canvas, I wasn't sure how I should explain that my originals were just pieces of 8.5 x 11-inch paper that I'd drawn on with a Sharpie. I'd never painted anything on canvas in my life. Thus far I've been hesitantly navigating through the shallow end of the art world waters with the subdued fear of being recognized as an interloper and called out like when I used to wear my T-shirt into the public pool to hide my pre-teen chubbiness. "They'll all look at me and laugh once they realize I'm here by collective mistake!" I find relief from this skipping

record by continually returning to the streets themselves. Putting up a poster reminds me why I started doing what I do and where its value actually lies. Not in how much I can sell, but how much I can give away and how many people I can offer a positive sentiment to.

My work may not change the world, but if it helps someone summon the strength to face just one more day, maybe that's worth the gallon of paint it takes the city to cover it up. I'd like to think so. ■



# Half a Life Painting Walls:

## The Trajectory of Graffiti Artist Miguel "Kane One" Aguilar



Rooftop, 2012.

**W**hen I start a graffiti installation the first step is usually dropping off my kids at school. By the time the morning of painting comes I have already been mentally preparing the days before. I look through recent sketches. I read lists of color palettes that I've jotted down. I mind map ideas that I want to connect. I think about an intention or a goal I want to accomplish.

---

### MIGUEL AGUILAR

I've developed a mental stamina to conceptualize an idea and keep revising it while I complete other, everyday tasks. It becomes this roaring rumble of momentum under a tight deadline. By the time I arrive at the wall, it's go time. I'm focused. I scroll through different genres of music on my phone until I find one that plays off of the dynamics between my current emotions, the weather, and the physicality of immediate landscape; I am already thinking about my fourth and fifth permutations as I begin to paint my first layer.

**This is how I paint graffiti at 37 years old.**

I did my first graffiti mural in 1991, 2 years after I began tagging. It took me about 2 weeks to fumble through the process. I was 15 years old and worked on it every day after school. I didn't get any money for it and I paid for all the spray paint materials. The mural was approximately 50'x12'. I felt it was a fair trade to have the opportunity to paint a wall because I valued access to the practice, so I was glad to fund the project myself. Once I was done, it gave me credibility within the graffiti community to be able to paint other walls. I was able



to get more “permission walls” on my own by using photos of my first piece as a reference, and I started to get asked by other writers to paint on walls that they had permission for. Whenever a graffiti artist obtained permission from a property owner, the artist inherently become the curator for who else would paint there and how often installations rotated on that wall.

I became pretty obsessed with developing a fluency in both process and aesthetics. I wanted to make more informed decisions on the fly and have my pieces identified as my style. The following two summers I painted two pieces per week on average and spent 10-14 hours on each wall. This work-rigor really crystallized these parameters as my standard practice. I continued like this until my wife and I had our first child in 1998. I tried to continue painting as I normally had but it presented brand new challenges with my familial responsibilities. I

think I must have tried quitting graffiti at least half a dozen times over the years. We had two children by the time I received my BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in May 2000.

It took me the next 10 years to develop a harmony of priorities that didn't neglect my wife and children or whatever noncreative jobs I tried to withstand. I had to come to terms with how much of a hold my graffiti practice had on me since I was a teen. I had to let go of completing an installation within a 48-hour time frame. I started painting in 2- to 3-hour sessions over 1- to 2-week periods. And I didn't die.

#### Enter the iPhone.

I started taking progress-photos after each session so I could review them back at home. This reflective activity allowed me to revise the decisions I had made. I was able to put

Professor and graffiti artist “Kane One” tells us how his education, family, and iPhone have affected his ever-evolving career as a street artist.



Go Bears! (London), 2012.





*Life is good, 2012.*

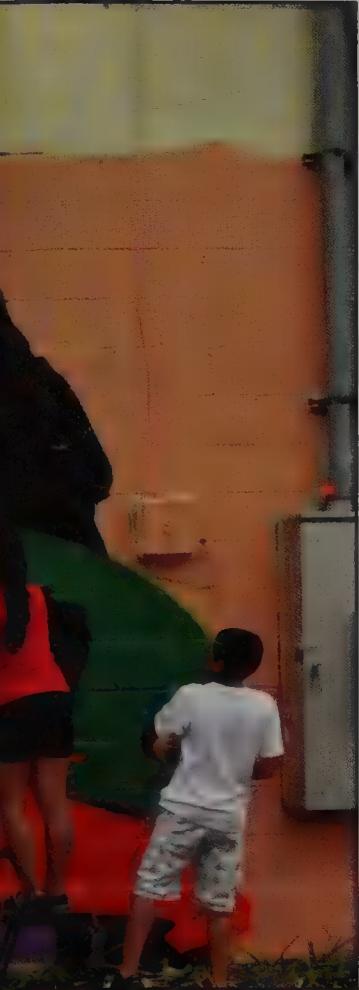
the art down, walk away for a while, do laundry, and then look back at what I had done. At first, I did it to keep up a mental momentum in anticipation for returning as soon as possible, but it slowly became an aesthetic benefit because I could spend more time flushing out different options. It was as if the progress-photos, along with Adobe Creative Suite and a light box, all functioned together as a *thumbnailing* practice, and the wall was my studio. My mode of production became more circular and less sequential.

In 2009, I was accepted into the Master's of Art in Teaching program at School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). I wanted to learn how to teach graffiti in Chicago Public Schools. The program enabled me to look at graffiti within a larger context of art education. I was able to identify educational frameworks for how I paint and how I had learned to paint. It was affirming, and it gave me the theoretical foundation from which to design my curriculum. I learned how to create exemplars for graffiti activities that were accessible to

a wide variety of age groups. The responsibility to make it as "easy" as possible to children further expanded the permissions I could give myself in my own practice. It has helped me identify, loosen, and dissolve oppressive blockages that I had learned from my teenage peers and mentors. I graduated in 2011 and began working for several nonprofit organizations as a teaching artist and as a program coordinator.

Now, as an educator, I continue to learn from my students about how they see graffiti and street art from a holistic perspective. They read a wide range of cultural production as part of the same practice and this perspective has informed me to take a much more inclusive approach in my own practice as well as my curriculum design. I've grown to integrate social media into my process by using Instagram as an educational platform for my Graffiti Institute ([www.instagram.com/graffitiinstitute](http://www.instagram.com/graffitiinstitute)) organization. I've also used Twitter (@Kane\_1) to crowd source collaborative graffiti installations with other practitioners.





Now, as an educator, I continue to learn from my students about how they see graffiti and street art from a holistic perspective.



*Pink deconstruction, 2012.*





*Team dynamite!, 2012.*

I've also begun enlisting my four children into my practice. Each has their own sketchbook and we draw together. My two older children, Kayla and Kane, help me paint some of my outdoor installations and Kane sets up my DSLR camera with time lapse remote for me on location in order to document my process. It's a great way to spend time—talking about art—with my kids. I think by doing this, I can give them insight into my processes as a working framework for how to navigate other parts of our/their daily lives. In that, there is a space that I've arrived at together with my wife (a Chicago Public School teacher) where parent and educator are truly reciprocal.

*Miguel Aguilar is an Adjunct Professor at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and founder of Graffiti Institute in Chicago, Illinois. E-mail: [maguil@saic.edu](mailto:maguil@saic.edu)*



Reverse graffiti—a form of street art that involves wiping away grime and dirt to reveal original, clean surfaces—stresses the importance of taking care of our environment.

# Cleaning Our World Through Reverse Graffiti

GABE RANDAZZO and LISA LAJEVIC

**W**e have come to the realization that the Earth is not invincible; we must preserve our habitat for it to remain hospitable. So how can we, as teachers, educate future generations about specific environmental topics such as pollution and sustainability and their effects on the Earth? One exciting way we found to incorporate science into the art curriculum is through the use of ecological art, more specifically a process of reverse pollution. *Reverse pollution* attempts to change a contaminated environment back to its original unsoiled state.

Over the last decade artists have begun to experiment with reverse pollution techniques, such as reverse graffiti, which focuses on cleaning environmental surfaces. Having recently been introduced to the works of Moose,<sup>1</sup> the artist known for inventing the reverse graffiti technique, we decided to design a curriculum to increase student awareness of ecological issues. Hoping to inspire students to become agents of change through art, the activity encourages students to investigate the adverse effects of pollution, reflect upon how their actions impact the Earth, and engage in ecologically friendly artmaking practices. This article examines ecological art and reverse pollution, and presents a lesson idea that expands upon the traditional reductive art process by using reverse graffiti to “clean” dirty surfaces such as cars, sidewalks, windows, or walls, transforming them into public pieces of ecological art.

## Exploring Ecology

Although some people have retained an interest in keeping Earth clean throughout history, the planet’s ecological needs have more often taken a backseat to other impeding issues such as the demands of industry, development, and war (Krug, 2002).

Perhaps a renewed awareness of our environment came in 2006, when Al Gore released his book and documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* (Bender, Burns, & David, 2006). The need for us to rethink our lifestyles and to care for the Earth are messages clearly conveyed by Gore, and as long as we inhabit Earth we own the responsibility of maintaining it. While some people have taken it upon themselves to better the planet, many continue to go about their everyday lives without thinking twice about their destructive actions. Some multinational corporations and industry titans have taken steps in a positive direction by installing green initiatives; for example, the use of solar power, electric cars, wind power, and recycled energy.

The current trend of helping the planet and improving its future condition needs to remain a prevalent topic in society and education. Understanding that most of the efforts currently being made to aid the planet may not affect us in our lifetimes, we are looking instead to improve the lives of future generations. If students are taught about the importance of protecting the Earth, they may acquire a “green” stance from a young age. Although ecological issues are most often taught in



*Reverse pollution... is not a backwards movement, but a dynamic multidirectional movement, aiming to restore and maintain our ecological surroundings.*

science class, another way to raise awareness for the environment is through art. Since art has the power to influence change and increase awareness, incorporating ecological issues into art education is essential in cultivating knowledgeable, proactive citizens. Students can think through ecological issues to create art that aims to generate a consciousness of one's effect on the planet.

In the past few decades, art teachers have incorporated green initiatives into the curriculum. Among the most common practices, students are asked to use recycled objects (e.g., plastic bottles, paper, cardboard, milk cartons, and magazines) as art materials (Armstrong, 2010; Childress, 2010; Marino & Romano, 2010; Sabin, 2010; Wayne, 2010). Some teachers choose to utilize the natural environment as the key art resource in their lessons (Bartholomeo, 2011); for example, students create works made entirely of leaves, sticks, dirt, grass, and pine needles (Sacco, 2009). Additionally, a number of art educators incorporate environmentally friendly practices throughout the entire year by recycling, conserving energy, reducing waste, and minimizing toxins in the art room (Inwood, 2010), while others ask students to create posters in order to educate the public about ecological issues, especially for special events such as Earth Day.

## Ecological Art

Rooted in both ecology and contemporary art, ecological art explores the relationship between humans and their natural environment. *Ecology* is a complex term that can be defined as a "concern for the maintenance of the integrity of natural systems, including homeostasis and diversity" (Krug, 2002, p. 185). Tangled in the intricate, always-changing web of ecology, human actions directly impact the Earth; our short- and long-term decisions have both negative and positive effects on the environment, organisms, and human health. Understanding natural systems and their interconnectedness, ecological thinking is about being socially responsible and understanding the impact of every choice and action one makes beyond the immediate context.

Ecological art, which specifically deals with nature and other natural systems, has a widely defined and expansive history. It can be argued that the first pieces of ecological art were the cave paintings, focused on animals and plants drawn on the walls of the Earth. In ancient times spiritual leaders often used forms of ecological art to transcribe Earth's powers into a visual, tangible form (Krug, 2002). Since then, ecological art has shifted away from its sacred uses in ceremonies and rituals and instead has come to focus on a tangible incorporation of the Earth into art. In the 1950s Robert Rauschenberg began to

experiment with found natural objects by using grass and soil as his medium to create "Earth Paintings" (Krug, 2002). His works were monumental because they not only transcended the boundaries between 2-D and 3-D art, but also forced the art world to view raw Earth materials as a new medium. After the first Earth Day in 1970, the popularity of ecological art soared and continued to increase in years to come due to the signing of multiple environmental acts and laws in addition to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (Krug, 2002). Around this time ecological art began to focus on the inclusion of social issues and the promotion of awareness for positive ecological change.

In the 1970s the artist's perception of the natural environment was altered once again during the land art movement. Land art transformed the idea of the traditional landscape; the natural environment of uncultivated spaces became the new canvas to land artists. One of the key pioneers of the land art movement was artist Robert Smithson, whose large-scale artworks such as *Spiral Jetty* (1970) transform the natural state of the land in a large way (Kastner & Wallis, 1998). However, Smithson's interest in the transformative forces of the natural environment often led to the destruction or unnatural rearrangement of the Earth. Although his art became part of the environment, it was not necessarily ecologically beneficial.

During the 21st century, artists continue to use ecology as art materials, as inspiration, and as subject matter to inquire into social issues. Some artists including Moose, Scott Wades, and Alexandre Orion (Smith, 2011) experiment with reverse pollution techniques in their artmaking practices. Reverse pollution aims to undo previous contamination and reduce further pollution by raising awareness and encouraging society to take a green, clean stance. It challenges pollution, which can be defined as "the contamination of air, water, or substances that are harmful to living organism... [which can occur] as the result of human activities" (Pollution, n.d.). Through the processes of growing and preserving trees and plants to naturally clean the air, cleaning dirt off surfaces, and using water purifiers to clean contaminated water, we can extract pollution from different sources.

Reverse pollution works with the Earth rather than against it as it attempts to change the environment back to its original clean state. It is not a backwards movement, but a dynamic multidirectional movement, aiming to restore and maintain our ecological surroundings. Recognizing the Earth as an active living entity (that is constantly changing), reverse pollution highlights the possibilities of *the Earth-in-the-making*. We can think of reverse pollution as a process of un-becoming (while simultaneously becoming); in order to prevent further





Figure 1. Recontextualizing a car with nature: Art example of reverse graffiti on the dirty surface of a car.



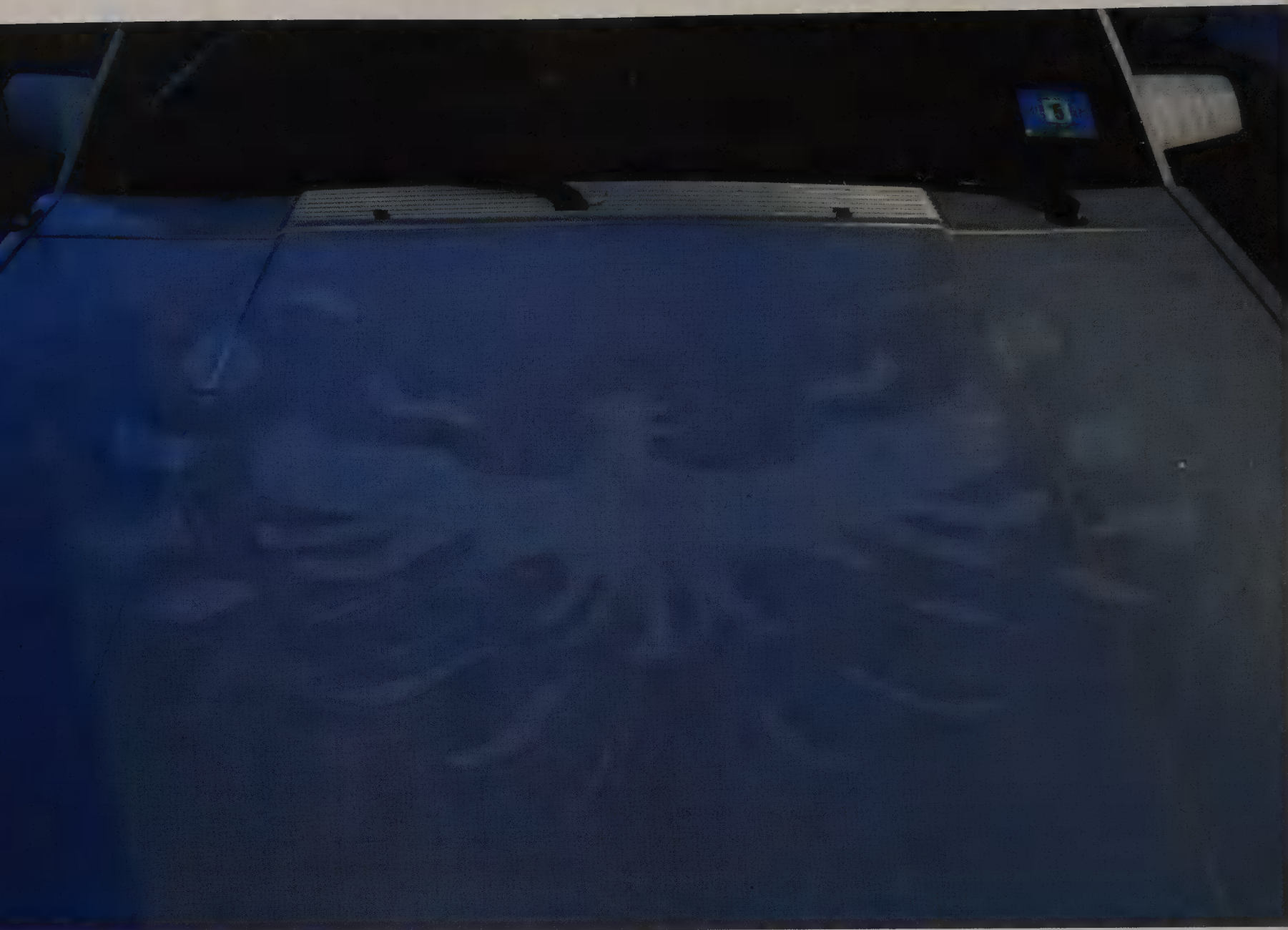


Figure 2. Art example of reverse graffiti on the dirty hood of a car.

contamination of Earth's ecological systems, society needs to un-become by changing bad habits and actions that contribute to pollution. Being socially and environmentally conscientious of our actions and of the implications they may have for the future (e.g., understanding the causes of pollution, being responsive to global and local conditions, adapting to changing conditions, modifying our routines), we can work toward finding and maintaining an ecological balance through the help of reverse pollution.

Reverse pollution offers artists such as Moose opportunities to make connections among the discourses of art, aesthetics, ecology, and culture (Krug, 2002). In writing about ecological art, Krug states:

Artists who explore social ecology critically examine everyday life experiences for bringing about positive ecological change. These artists strive to mediate ideas of union [humans as part of nature] and stewardship [human care of nature] by questioning the ecological impact of the built environment and social unrest... These artists scrutinize relations of power that produce

community tensions about ecological issues. They encourage viewers to question individual and collective assumptions, beliefs, and practices and take action to bring about positive and healthy conditions of social change. (p. 188)

As part of a complex world, contemporary artists who work with reverse pollution help to bring to the forefront ecological issues that may be overlooked or commonly accepted as social norms. They facilitate new ways of thinking in and through art (and ecology), and encourage people to think critically and make meaningful connection between themselves and their environmental surroundings.

Wanting to expose our students to ecological issues through art, we looked for interesting ways to share our findings about reverse pollution. One creative technique, known as *reverse graffiti*, sparked our interest. Reverse graffiti (Moreton, 2011; Morgan, 2006; Smith, 2011), also referred to as grime writing, re-facing (not defacing), and clean tagging, is a technique used to create ecological artworks relating to reverse pollution. Unlike graffiti, which often utilizes spray paint to illegally draw



In exploring reverse graffiti in the classroom, students learn how to use a new medium for artmaking, create artwork on public surfaces, and recognize the importance of using artwork not only as a form of expressing oneself, but also as a way of raising awareness about social issues through art.

images or “tag” text on public surfaces, reverse graffiti involves a reductive process of cleaning and removing layers of dirt from polluted surfaces in order to create temporary, contrasting positive and negative images. In contrast to graffiti, which is typically viewed by the public as menacing, criminal, and corruptive due to its often illegal nature and sometimes rebellious subject matter, reverse graffiti can transform the industrial landscape and public spaces through a sustainable graffiti, challenge the idea of graffiti as vandalism, and promote awareness about the dirtiness of the planet in a creative, “more” legal,<sup>2</sup> and clean way.

### Reverse Graffiti in the Art Classroom

Translating our findings about ecology, reverse pollution, and reverse graffiti into a meaningful curricular art idea for the classroom, the remainder of this article presents how we, a preservice art teacher and college art education course instructor, encourage secondary students<sup>3</sup> to create powerful unique artworks. In exploring reverse graffiti in the classroom, students learn how to use a new medium for artmaking, create artwork on public surfaces, and recognize the importance of using artwork not only as a form of expressing oneself, but also as a way of raising awareness about social issues through art (see Figures 1 & 2).

To introduce the topic of pollution and its ongoing effects on our planet, we asked students to reflect upon how they contribute to pollution and also how they can become more ecologically friendly. We believe it is important for students to learn that there are ways to combat pollution and have a positive effect on the planet. In order to personally engage students in the topic of reverse pollution, we presented the concept of reverse graffiti. Asking if anyone had ever seen, or written, “wash me” on the back of a dirty car, or cleaned away parts of a dusty surface to create an image, we informed students that they have engaged in an artmaking practice without knowing it! This dialogue allowed students to easily relate to the reverse graffiti technique.

After establishing a connection between contemporary art and ecology, we introduced Moose as our featured artist. Paul

“Moose” Curtis (b. 1965) invented the reverse graffiti technique when he was working as a kitchen porter in his teens and cleaned a dirty mark off the restaurant wall, exposing the cleanliness of the original wall below. Reflecting upon this discovery, Moose explained, “It showed how dirty the place was, it got me thinking” (Moreton, 2011). Since then, he has focused his artmaking practices around the incorporation of cleaning techniques. Moose began his large-scale public reverse graffiti works in 2000 to expand his personal body of work and promote an ecological message (Curtis, n.d.).

Shortly after his artworks began to gain exposure and popularity within the art community, he was hired by multiple companies to produce commercial artworks. Perhaps Moose’s most well-known piece, commissioned by a branch of Clorox’s cleaning supply company, is *Green Works* (2008). Moose chose to transform the 120-foot Broadway Tunnel wall in downtown San Francisco into an artistic canvas. Over the years the wall accumulated a thick layer of dirt and grime due to car exhaust fumes and other polluting factors, so when most of the city was at home sleeping, Moose took to the streets at night with his crew to “clean” an artwork. Under the watch of Californian highway police, who stopped and redirected traffic, Moose’s team worked diligently. Using power washers filled with recycled water, Green Works cleaning products, and large woodcut stencils (upwards of 5 feet in length), he sprayed clean images onto the wall (Curtis, n.d.). Moose’s decision to “clean” images of indigenous trees and plants supported his aim to represent not only the living organisms that once lived there, but also the destructive force humans have on the natural environment. Within the dirt, Moose created beautiful contrasting images, revealing the original color of the tunnel wall below in the positive space and in the negative space remained the dark, murky brown (i.e., the polluted wall space). As commuters and polluters drove past the wall, they were confronted with the consequences of their choices to drive vehicles that pollute. Perhaps reflecting upon their personal contributions to pollution encouraged them to use alternative means of transportation such as bicycles, walking, or carpooling.



As we viewed and discussed Moose's personal and commercial artwork, we had students engage in a critique of his reverse graffiti murals. In addition to examining the elements and principles of design, we also debated the social aspects of the work; for example, how it conveys ecological messages, the environmental implications of the artmaking process, and the ability it encompasses to make viewers aware of their actions and the negative effects it has on the planet. We discussed important issues surrounding temporal public art, the legality of reverse graffiti, corporate greenwashing,<sup>4</sup> commercial art, and the institutionalization, lucrateness, and mainstreaming of graffiti art. Through this conversation students began to understand the complexities of reverse graffiti and how their lives, culture, art, and ecology are inherently connected.

Transitioning our focus to the reverse graffiti technique, we then asked students to practice the reductive art process using charcoal and kneaded erasers. By performing a quick demonstration of how to use the eraser to lift off charcoal from a charcoal-covered paper surface, we showed how to create positive and negative spaces. Finding that graphic shapes and stencil type images tend to work best, we reminded students to refrain from creating small and ornate designs, and to avoid the use of value or shading. Also, since the focus of this lesson is on the reverse graffiti technique and promoting social awareness of pollution, we allowed students to choose their own subject matter and encouraged them to engage in ecological thinking by considering the site (e.g., location and historical background), audience, and message they wanted to communicate.

Once students completed a minimum of three charcoal designs, we met to decide which one they would use for their final artwork. Walking around school grounds, we selected possible sites for the artmaking. Basing their decisions on the size and shape of the image, students chose the surface on which they wanted to work; this could be any dirty surface such as a sidewalk, wall, car, or window. It is important to remember to gain prior approval from the principal and property or car owner before beginning the artmaking activity, which can be done through a permission form. While some of our students chose exterior building walls, sidewalks, and windows as their canvases, some of our students opted to complete their work on dirty car surfaces, thus creating mobile pieces of public artwork.<sup>5</sup> Students had the option to draw their design onto the surface or create a type of stencil on poster board (similar to how Moose used wooden stencils) and then cut it out with a craft knife. The stencil is then placed over the dirty surface and the positive space is cleaned away.

Before students began their artmaking, we demonstrated how to safely clean dirt off the surfaces using supplies such as environmental friendly soap, reusable cloths (which can be made from recycled fabrics), biodegradable cleaning wipes, and water.<sup>6</sup> We reminded students to be conscious of their choices, limiting the amount of materials they used—as well as of their actions, thinking about the products, water usage, and long-lasting effects it may have on the Earth. By wrapping reusable cloths and cleaning wipes around the end of thin wooden sticks,

dipping them in a soap solution, and then applying it to the dirty surface, the artist has the ability to “draw” an outline of the design on the surface, similar to how one sketches on paper prior to finalizing their drawing. We explained how to enlarge the design to fit the space and that students needed to work carefully to not make mistakes, as it is difficult to re-dirty the surface. Based on our experiences, we find it is best to use thinner sticks wrapped with cloth for smaller detailed areas, and the wipes or cloths for larger areas. Since the surfaces may get suds on them from all of the soap, it is helpful to wash away wet dirt stuck on the surface with water; however, be sure to not wash away the dirt being used as negative space as that is vital to the design. Although everyone was excited to begin, we reminded the students working with painted surfaces not to scratch the dirty surface with their fingernails or sharp objects, because it will harm the paint and possibly get them into trouble!

As the students were working we helped them tweak their designs to work efficiently on the dirty surface. When the students finished, they photographed their work (as documentation is an important process of temporal art) and presented their artworks to the class in a critique setting, in which the students analyzed each other's work and shared constructive criticism. By reflecting upon the potential impact of their artwork, the students came to realize that they have the ability to create public works that promote social awareness of ecological issues.

## Concluding Remarks

Recent literature suggests the importance of incorporating contemporary art into the classroom (Mayer, 2008; Walker, 2001). Often exploring conceptual and social issues, contemporary art investigates interdisciplinary themes that are prevalent in everyday life/culture, and challenges viewers/students to examine worldly issues and formulate their own beliefs. Incorporating artists, such as Moose, allows students to question and investigate important ecological issues and establish significant connections between life, school, and the current art world (Gaudelius & Speirs, 2002). Throughout the lesson students are encouraged to become culturally aware and active members of society through the study and/or creation of art (Mayer, 2008). Furthermore, experimenting with everyday cleaning tools as art materials challenges students to take risks as they branch out of their comfort zones and creatively expand beyond the traditional use of paint and pencils in their artmaking. Highlighting the importance of the process, students are encouraged to understand art as a meaning-making endeavor instead of simply focusing on formalist traditions (i.e., elements of art) and the final product.

Linking the academic subject of science to art, we attempt to open up a space of inclusiveness in teaching and learning. Investigating topics in art class such as pollution, sustainability, and ecology, which are prevalent areas of study in science, this lesson promotes interdisciplinary connections and the potential of cross-curricular explorations. Recognizing the educational curriculum as a whole, this lesson does not divide the curriculum into distinct parts (i.e., science and art), but celebrates the



rhizomatic overlapping qualities between subjects and content. Using contemporary artmaking practices as inspiration, it concentrates on the Arts' ability to teach across the curriculum and transcend the school subject boundaries. Exploring reverse graffiti as an effective teaching practice aims to push the traditional boundaries of art education by promoting student understandings of art, world, and self. Students are no longer ignorant of ecological problems and social issues of our time; instead they are transformed into persuasive agents of change. We hope this article facilitates new ways of thinking and artmaking through ecological art, and presents possibilities for teaching and learning with contemporary art and reverse pollution.

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## ENDNOTES

- Examples of Moose's reverse graffiti artworks can be found online at various websites including [www.symbollix.com](http://www.symbollix.com) and [www.youtube.com/watch?v=5lX-2sP0JFw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5lX-2sP0JFw)
- Although there has been controversy surrounding the legality of reverse graffiti, Moose maintains that he is not damaging property, rather cleaning property (i.e., performing a community service). Throughout his career he has been arrested many times but not charged with a crime (i.e., his artmaking is not destructive since he only removes dirt). However, when working on a reverse graffiti advertising campaign for Smirnoff in 2004, he created artworks in England where it is illegal to advertise in a public space without permission. As such, the Leeds City Council explained that creating street art without the necessary permissions was in fact vandalism and under the Anti-Social Behaviour Act (2003) Moose was required to "remove" his artwork (Abominable ink, 2012; Chapman, 2011). Although we do not know whether Moose had to replace the dirt or clean the entire surface to eliminate the artwork, this situation provoked an interesting discussion about public art, dirt/pollution, reverse graffiti, and rogue advertising.
- This lesson was designed for high school students and taught in a pre-service art education course. It was also presented at a state art education conference and received positive feedback from the art teachers in attendance.
- Moose's reverse graffiti idea has been adopted and used for publicity purposes by advertising firms such as CURB (Curb, 2001) and GreenGraffiti (Brenhouse, 2010). Although some critics challenge the environmental friendliness of these clean advertisements, the companies argue that it eliminates the need for additional billboards, uses less water than what is needed to create a poster version of the same large scale, and eliminates waste. GreenGraffiti has also begun to donate a liter of clean drinking water to areas in need for each liter of water used during the artmaking process, and is planning to use renewable fuels to run their power washing equipment (Brenhouse, 2010). In addition to creatively selling a product, these companies are selling a socially and environmentally responsible ideal.
- There are many possible extensions for this lesson including a collaborative artwork on a school bus, large-scale community project such as a tunnel, building wall, or sidewalk, or collaboration with a science teacher to closely examine pollution in the community, runoff into local streams, water table, etc.
- Cotton swabs such as Q-tips can be used as well, but students should reuse them and try to limit the amount of waste.





"Earl Flag Face" and "Earl Crossed Plugs" from the Earl Lube Industries archives.

All the girls love Earl Lee, who appears in street art around the world. Earl Lee is a lovable, handsome man who owns the fictitious Earl Lube Industries. Known as "the most complex and sophisticated all-around millionaire sportsman, daredevil, and lady-killer the world has ever known."

— [www.earllee.com](http://www.earllee.com)

# The Earl Lee Street Art Campaign

BUBBA





"Earl Lube" can from the Earl Lube Industries archives.

left

"Crazy Horse" sign. Photo by Chris Darnal.

Originally intended to bring a smile to people's faces at a time when there wasn't much to smile about, Earl Lee came to life as a humorous antidote to the "2008 depression," pasted on the myriad of empty, abandoned, and out-of-business storefronts, signs, and buildings in Southern California. The Earl Lee street art campaign is about the creation of a mythical retro-campy character who is President and CEO of the fictional Earl Lube Industries. An idealized man that borrows the most desirable characteristics we see in celebrities and athletes yet remains wholesome and approachable despite riches and success.

Characterized as the most complex and sophisticated all-around millionaire sportsman, daredevil, and lady-killer the world has

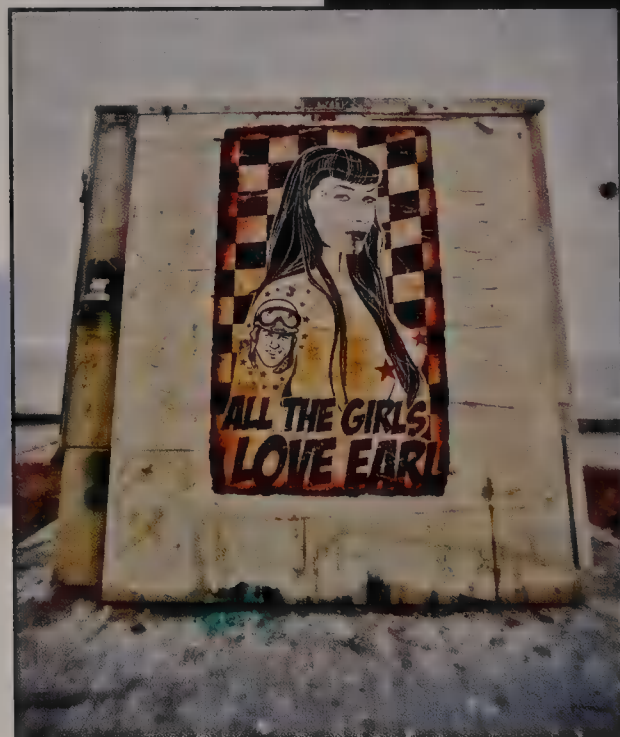
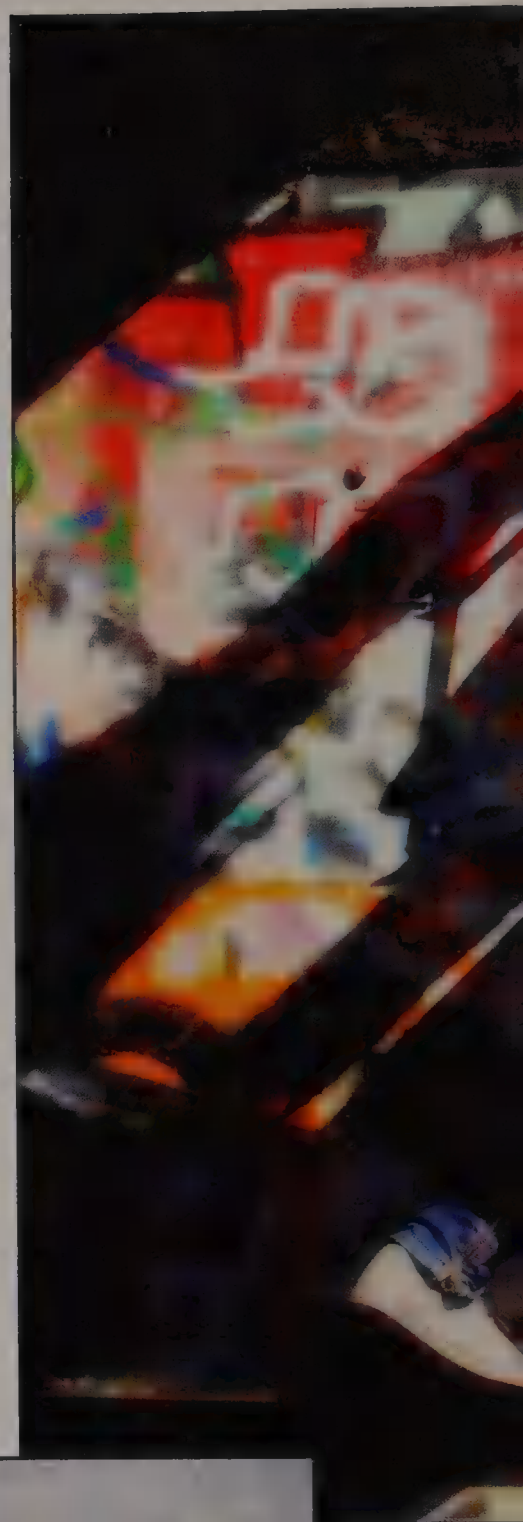


ever known. Combine the classic movie-star good looks of Cary Grant and the guts of Chuck Norris and what you get is none other than Earl Lee. He's the outdoorsman that makes Bear Grylls want to stay indoors. His penchant for fast cars and winning ways turned him into an elusive icon that the most gorgeous women can hang with for only a night, simultaneously breaking the hearts of every center-fold, starlet, and trophy queen he encounters.

The slogan "All The Girls Love Earl" is catchy and at first glance appears to be just another advertisement. However, a closer look rewards the passerby, who begins to take a journey with the artist to an alternative reality where nice guys do finish first.

On the outside he appears to be simultaneously capable of reconciling an unquenchable drive to succeed at what he does, with the unwillingness to do so at another's expense. At the end of every race, checkered flag in hand and trophy queen under his arm, he is the epitome of Mr. Nice Guy and all the women flock to him.

On the flip side, self-sponsored by his own company, the highly successful Earl Lube Industries, Earl becomes all business when his chin strap is buckled up and he is strapped into the race car, airplane, motorcycle, or whatever it may be that day. On the way to the checkered flag, racing for personal and company honor, Earl's competitors are likely to meet his alter ego and more edgy side if they race him dirty. 'Cause in this business everybody knows that "Speed Kills."



"Erika Loves Earl." Photo by PhotoJenInc.





"Earl Lube 500" install. Photo by PhotoJenInc.



"Speed Kills" from the Earl Lube Industries archives.

The passerby... begins to take a journey with the artist to an alternative reality where nice guys do finish first.





"Chim Chim Loves Earl."  
Photo by PhotoJenInc.

Earl Lee embodies every American's desire to be the best at what they do, while being the best person they can be. With a healthy respect for his fellows and unflinching determination to never back down, Earl Lee is the kind of man a mother would wish her son to grow up like, and every other woman on the planet could only wish to have the attention of.

From California to Europe and the Far East... if there are beautiful women and a racetrack, you may see Earl Lee turn up there.

Bubba,  
Janitor, Earl Lube Industries



After three teens die in a tragic railway accident, members of the FUNK graffiti crew discuss art, education, and graffiti culture, telling us what art educators should know.

# Graffiti and Art Education:

*"They Don't Understand How I Feel About the FUNK"*

ROSALIND HAMPTON

with DARE, HYKE, and JUICE

**O**n the morning of October 31, 2010, three adolescents were killed by a VIA rail passenger train under Montreal's Turcot Interchange, a well-known area for graffiti writers to paint. Traveling at 65 miles per hour with dimmed headlights, the engineer did not see five boys walking on the tracks. The children did not hear or see the train coming, and 17-year-olds Dylan Ford, Ricardo Conesa, and Mitch Bracken-Guenet lost their lives. The other two boys survived, deeply traumatized by the horror they witnessed that night (CTV Montreal, 2011).

Dylan "JAYS" Ford was a member of FUNK Crew, a Montreal group of roughly a dozen graffiti writers ranging from adolescence to their early 30s. Devastated by the loss of their friend, the crew plunged themselves into their work, becoming involved in fundraising for the Dylan Ford Art Scholarship Fund (<http://dylanfordscholarship.com>) intended to support and encourage young artists and perhaps to limit the personal and legal risks they take to become recognized graffiti "kings." One year after the accident, the first FUNK Crew art exposition opened on October 28th, 2011, at SubV gallery and boutique in Montreal.

Members of FUNK have also been involved in ongoing conversations about art, education, and graffiti culture with Rosalind, an art educator and the mother of a graffiti artist. Following the accident, three senior members of the crew—DARE, HYKE, and JUICE—and Rosalind decided to share some of what has emerged in these conversations by co-authoring an article exploring such questions as: Are graffiti writers artists? What should art educators know about graffiti culture? Should art educators teach students about graffiti? As have our conversations, this article aims to bring together the perspectives of DARE, HYKE, and JUICE based on their experiences as graffiti artists, Rosalind's perspectives as a parent and community art educator, and some of the literature we have found on graffiti. Rather than a research study in the formal institutional sense, the four authors of this article have formed a small community of inquiry to which each of us brings our multiple, unique perspectives and ways of understanding graffiti.





Dylan "JAYS" Ford (1993-2010).

## Are Graffiti Writers Artists?

While there is an overall commitment to "the street" among graffiti writers, younger adolescent writers tend to see their graffiti in more rebellious, vandalistic terms, while older veteran writers are more likely to be thinking about their futures and careers, more likely to have developed individual aesthetic styles, and consequently are more inclined to think of themselves as artists. Overall, whether or not graffiti writers are considered to be artists depends on one's definition of "art"; since the 1980s some writers have aimed to participate in the formal art establishment while others have remained committed to an illegal street practice (Gablík, 1982).

Critically, in hip-hop graffiti an in-between space has also emerged between the streets and the formal galleries, in the form of alternative exhibition spaces and urban boutiques where writers can show their work and launch art careers. This has been an invaluable development within the culture and is largely the work of veteran writers, including those with post-secondary art school training who remain weary of the elitism and exclusivity of the art world. These artists prefer to situate their careers in the context of graffiti subculture where many of them have grown up and already earned a degree of celebrity. (For examples of the relationship between the "art world" and

graffiti, see Audi, 2011; Banksy, 2010; Bowen, 1999; Gablík, 1982; Kohl, 2009; Lewisohn, 2008; Miller, 2002.)

The broad age range among FUNK Crew writers creates opportunities for mentorship and career development driven by the vision and experiences of the older members. For DARE, the founder of FUNK, graffiti is always art whether it is on the street or in a gallery; he sees graffiti as being linked to ancient African hieroglyphics and other forms of creative public expression that are like visual storytelling. His crew's graffiti tells stories about their lives and identities, giving them a chance to create their own identities how they want them to be and to earn respect from their peers.

Ivor Miller's (2002) research with subway artists in New York City also revealed African and Caribbean influences associated with graffiti, and how hip-hop graffiti can be understood as part of an African diaspora and Caribbean cultural tradition of creating new hybrid forms of art through "cultural processes of selection and fusion" (p. 34). FUNK members represent diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds, and several identify as African diaspora. For FUNK, as for the subway painters interviewed by Miller, graffiti is a predominantly working-class cultural expression informed by African diaspora sensibilities, and is situated within the broader hip-hop culture. Reflecting this multidisciplinary context, various FUNK Crew members also write, perform, and produce rap music and slam poetry.



Another way to think about the relationship between graffiti and art is through notions of “the vernacular.” Graffiti can be understood as a form of vernacular art, commonly understood as creations by artists without formal training, and often admired as “authentic” expressions that are not regulated by the established disciplines of art. As art scholars Paul and William Arnett (2001) note in relation to African American vernacular art practices, the vast majority of these art forms are “seen by few eyes, are profoundly noninstitutional and noncommercial, perhaps intractably local, and are... interleaved with sites whose full meanings can seldom be wholly recreated or ethically relocated” (p. 2).

JUICE shares this view of graffiti, and feels that it is only graffiti when it is in the streets. He sees himself as an artist, but views graffiti and his other artwork as two separate yet overlapping parts of his life. He enjoys going out and doing illegal work, but doesn’t think it can do much for his life beyond giving him personal satisfaction. He does not think of it as “art” aimed at the public; when he’s doing graffiti he doesn’t really think about what other people think of his work. Growing up he never thought he’d have any graffiti talent, but seeing himself progress and having people say they like a spot or a canvas feels really good—that’s why he loves it. At the same time he experiences it as work—like a job that’s not giving him money but giving him something else.

DARE, HYKE, and JUICE would all be happy to work legally as full-time as artists, and have experienced varying degrees of success obtaining legal contracts to paint in the past 2 years. However, they continue to have doubts that they can earn a living as artists. DARE has also found that working on legal contracts often involves negotiating the content of his work; that graffiti artists who get paid usually have to be more aligned with the mainstream political ideas or able to target specific affluent audiences.

## What We Think Art Educators Should Know About Graffiti

### *The Culture*

Graffiti can contribute positively to community building and promote unity, providing a sense of belonging and membership for youth. Graffiti culture provides a source of male mentorship and brotherhood that is otherwise missing from the lives of many writers. HYKE gets the most motivation from the praise of other writers and from the feeling he gets when he’s out in the city and sees the work of his crew. Other graffiti artists tend to be the primary audience of most writers, because they are most qualified to comment on the quality of the work. In a broad sense it is very important to writers that they speak to and with the many social, cultural, ethnic, and geographic communities with which they identify. This is why writers give “shout outs” to other writers by noting their names on pieces, and paint graffiti that promotes particular neighborhoods, local sports teams, and pride in ethno-cultural communities (Bowen, 1999).

We also feel it is important to note, however, that graffiti culture can also have negative outcomes; it can create more divisiveness in communities and promote further delinquency. Different crews have different codes of behavior and expectations of their members. Furthermore, graffiti writers often have a lot of power and influence over younger kids in their communities, whether they embrace this responsibility or not. Many adults fail to notice the graffiti writers in their communities, but kids have a different relationship with the streets and often admire the writers and want to be around them. Yet graffiti writers are not always the best role models; some are very community-oriented, while others embrace antisocial, even “celebrity criminal” personas.

## Does understanding risk conceptually affect adolescent choices about participating in graffiti writing?

### *The Risks*

As an educator and the parent of a graffiti writer, Rosalind has consistently been torn between concerns for the safety of writers and an understanding of graffiti as a valid form of art and meaning making, creative public self expression, and political protest. In the name of being a graffiti artist her son has been repeatedly arrested, has been harassed and beaten up by police, has been in fights with other writers, and has taken enormous risks to paint trains and various elevated ledges. Her son once spent several days in a holding cell on graffiti charges, following which the judge who heard his case complimented his art skills and assured him that he would do time in jail if arrested again (on graffiti artists doing jail time, see Audi, 2011). Other parents have not been so lucky; graffiti writers have been killed by trains and by other writers, have lost limbs in accidents, have caught fire, and been electrocuted on train tracks.

It is critical, literally a matter of life and death, that art educators consider how graffiti might intervene in adolescent identity development and spark a risk-taking tendency, particularly in adolescent males. As art educator Koon Hwe-Kan (2001) has insightfully stated in relation to graffiti: concepts and ideas can be more dangerous to art students than sharp tools and toxic materials. The severe consequences faced by writers—including the loss of adolescent lives in tragic graffiti-related accidents—require us to ask if teenagers really *can* understand the risks involved in graffiti, even when they engage in critical discussions about the potential consequences



with well-meaning art educators. Does understanding risk conceptually affect adolescent choices about participating in graffiti writing?

The authors of a recent study on adolescent brain development and risk-taking clearly state that research demonstrates that “increasing adolescents’ awareness of various risks has little impact on their decision-making outside of the laboratory” (Dayan, Bernard, Olliac, Mailhes and Kermarrec, 2010, p. 282). Similarly, adolescents tend to base their decision-making on immediate, short-term outcomes rather than on those in the longer term and “are better motivated by reward than by negative reinforcement” (p. 283). Clearly, graffiti has strong rewards, particularly in the form of peer recognition and the achievement of the reputational status of a graffiti writer (Taylor, 2010).

Graffiti can also be highly addictive to young writers. While not every adolescent who experiments with graffiti develops what can be described as an addiction, for some the sheer compulsion to paint becomes entirely consuming. UK-based artist and curator Cedar Lewisohn (2008) observes that this might be “linked to the mindset of the people who are attracted to graffiti” (p. 45), pointing to egotism as a potential driving force. He asserts that an analogy can be made between graffiti writing and the adrenaline rush of extreme sports. Educational psychologist Myra Frances Taylor (2010) studied the motivation of adolescent and adult graffiti writers in Australia and her participants confirmed the intense pleasure of the adrenaline rush they experience doing illegal graffiti. Adrenaline, Taylor explains, “activates the brain’s pleasure-seeking centre and produces a *fight* (risk-taking) or *flight* (risk-avoidance) response” (Wright et al., 2008, as cited in Taylor, p. 5).

Taylor’s study revealed that graffiti writers can become “addicted to the risk, recognition and respect that the graffiti lifestyle provides” (2010, pp. 54, 57, 66): graffiti begins as a rebellious activity through which early adolescents become

addicted to the risk-taking and adrenaline rush of illegal activity. As adolescent writers age and develop their aesthetic style, they become more interested in gaining the recognition and respect of their peers and expanding the geographic breadth of their writing, while seeking increasingly dangerous locations in order to maintain the pleasure and rush. Finally, as adults, graffiti “becomes a habitual high-risk compulsion over which they have little control. Furthermore, graffiti influences every aspect of their daily lives and overrides any consideration that their involvement could cause themselves or the ones they love physical or mental harm” (Taylor, p. 13; see also McQueeney, 2001). These findings are consistent with FUNK Crew’s experiences and observations of graffiti culture; most strikingly demonstrated perhaps in the seemingly endless JAYS memorial pieces painted on trains and highways directly following and since the accident (see Montreal Graffiti, 2010).

## Implications for Art Education: Should Art Educators Teach About Graffiti?

Art teachers sometimes incorporate graffiti lessons into their curriculum in response to their own and their students’ attraction to this subversive art form and its perceived “coolness” and “dangerous mystique” (for example, see Hathaway, 2007). FUNK Crew members do not believe that art teachers should teach children about graffiti, especially children younger than 16. Most young adolescents cannot differentiate between graffiti as vandalism and as art, and are confused by mixed messages from society’s celebration of some writers as artists while others are persecuted as criminals (Kan, 2001).

While it is important for art teachers to draw on their own and their students’ interests in planning lessons, we feel it is also their responsibility to examine their choices in relation to the best interests of the particular students they are teaching. When students are offered one-shot-deal graffiti lessons and mural projects, those who have been inspired are left on their own to “find” (often steal) supplies and to appropriate spaces to paint in their communities. In this sense we cannot stress enough the importance of long-term community mural programs and legal walls for graffiti (a point also emphasized by Bowen, 1999).

Members of FUNK Crew are grateful to art educators who have taught them various drawing and painting skills, and about the practices and careers of a diverse range of artists including those who are street- and community-based. However, only graffiti artists themselves are qualified, by virtue of their lived experiences, to teach about graffiti skills and culture. Art educators are well placed to join graffiti writers in calling for and developing community art education programs that offer youth positive mentoring systems, as well as broad support for graffiti murals and artists.

If art educators wish to design lessons about graffiti for older adolescents, we hope that they employ the expertise of graffiti artists themselves, and proceed in a well-informed, highly self-conscious manner, with a stark awareness of the profound responsibility involved in such a decision. Since the horrifying

**Art educators are well placed to join graffiti writers in calling for and developing community art education programs that offer youth positive mentoring systems, as well as broad support for graffiti murals and artists.**



accident that killed their friend, FUNK Crew members continue to paint and to weigh the pros and cons of more and less dangerous practices. For members of FUNK and many other graffiti writers there's always that feeling that *you just can't stop*. It may not be possible for anyone outside of the graffiti subculture to entirely comprehend the meaning of their work. As an old school hip-hop song once put it:

*But they don't understand how I feel about the funk;*

*I walk with the funk, I talk with the funk,*

*I eat with the funk, I sleep with the funk,*

*I live for the funk, I die for the funk.*

(Lords of the Underground, 1993)

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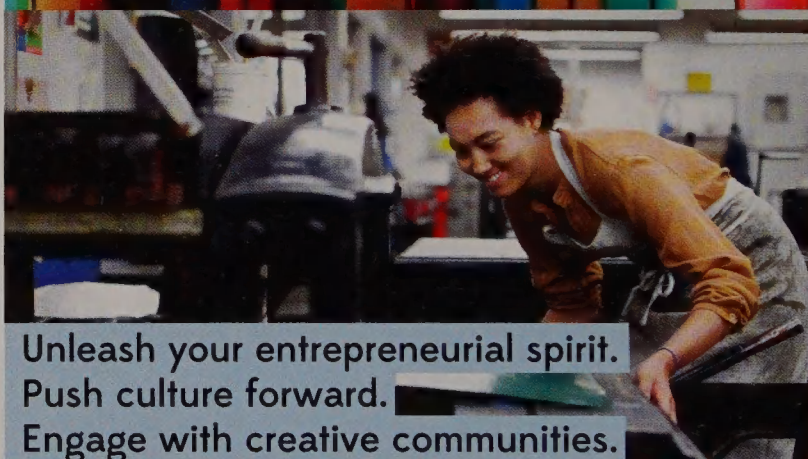
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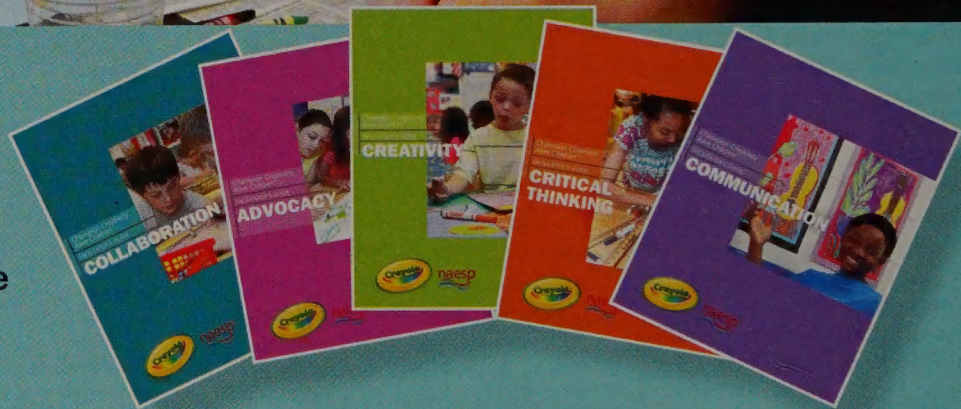
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